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WORKING PAPER

# School Meals Case Study: Nigeria

Prepared by the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, an initiative of the School Meals Coalition

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# Historical Background

Nigeria, officially the Federal Republic of Nigeria, became an independent country on 1st October 1960 and a republic in 1963. It is a country in the southeast of West Africa, with a coastline along the Bight of Benin and the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria shares borders with Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. It has a land area of 923,768 km<sup>2</sup> and is traversed by two main rivers: Niger, from which it got its name, and Benue, the principal tributary of Niger.

## Country Profile

### Population and Economics

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse federation of 36 autonomous states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), with a population of 236.7 million people (UN estimate, 2024), making it the most populous country in Africa and the sixth most populous country in the world. The capital city is Abuja, located in the centre of the Nation, while Lagos is the country's primary port, economic hub, and the largest city. It is estimated that Nigeria has about 250 different ethno-linguistic groups speaking over 500 distinct languages. Christianity (58%) and Islam (41%) are the country's major religions. Nigeria is one of the world's largest oil producers, and its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was worth 362.81 billion US dollars in 2023, representing 0.34 percent of the global economy (World Bank, 2024).

*Table 1: Key data on population and economic indicators*

Total population (2022)	Number of people aged 5 to 19	Number of people employed in agriculture sector	Gross Domestic Product per capita (2022)
218,541,212	79,509,689	73,990,462.7	\$2,162.6

According to the Nigeria Poverty Assessment Report (World Bank, 2022), as many as four in ten Nigerians live below the national poverty line. Many Nigerians – especially in the country's north - lack education and access to basic infrastructure, such as electricity, safe drinking water, and improved sanitation. Over 70 percent of Nigerians engage in the agricultural sector mainly at a subsistence level, using small plots and relying on seasonal rainfall. The lack of infrastructure, such as roads, further exacerbates poverty in rural areas by isolating rural farmers from essential inputs and profitable markets (FAO, 2022). Pressure from a growing population is also impacting diminishing resources and further threatening food production. Over-farmed land, deforestation, and overgrazing are severe in many parts of the country.

### Education

In Nigeria, the education sector is overseen by the Ministry of Education. The structure of the education system has undergone significant transformation over the years to reflect changing societal needs and global trends. The current system in use is the Universal Basic Education (UBE), also known as the 9-3-4 system, which was introduced in 2004 to replace the 6-3-3-4 system. This shift emphasizes foundational skills development, Information and

communication Technology (ICT) integration, and a broader range of subject choices in senior secondary school (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013).

The education system encompasses four main sectors: early childcare and development (age 0-4); basic education (age 5-15), which includes pre-primary education (1 year), primary education (6 years), and junior secondary school (3 years); post-basic/senior secondary education (3 years); and tertiary education (4 to 6 years, depending on the programme of study). The academic year typically runs from September to July.

In 2018, the total gross enrolment in public primary schools was 22,384,755 with 11,618,213 male and 10,766,542 female students enrolled. This marked a decline from the 2005 figures, with enrolment rates for girls dropping from 91% to 83% and for boys from 108% to 86%. The number of out-of-school children of primary school age has also increased by 50% from 6.4 to 9.7 million. The out-of-school rate has remained constant at 28% since 2010 (GEMR, 2022). More details on the Nigerian Education System are provided in Annex 1.

*Table 2: Education Data of Nigeria (Year 2024)<sup>1</sup>*

	Total number of students	Total number of schools	Average class size	Number of children involved in school meal	Percentage of children eligible for free school meals
Basic education (5-15 years)	39,775,313	79,775	35	9,990,862 Primary 1-3 pupils	-
Primary	31,771,916	65,529	35	9,990,862 Primary 1-3 pupils	Eligible 79.9% Beneficiaries 31.4 % (Primary 1-3)
Post Primary (JS 1-3)	8,003,397	13,921	35	-	-

## Food Security, Nutrition, and Health

- **Food Insecurity:**

As per the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) (SOFI 2022), Nigeria was ranked 107<sup>th</sup> out of 113 countries and 25<sup>th</sup> out of the 28 Sub-Saharan African countries, with an overall GFSI score of 42. Nigeria also ranks 109<sup>th</sup> out of the 125 countries on the 2023 Global Hunger Index, with a score of 28.3. The factors contributing to food insecurity in Nigeria include poverty, frequent conflicts and insecurity, which in some parts of the country have disrupted food production, markets, and distribution channels, leading to shortages and the displacement or migration of populations. Other factors include climate change, poor infrastructure (including inefficient transport networks and inadequate storage facilities), and inefficient food distribution systems. Food insecurity is closely linked to hunger and malnutrition, with malnutrition being the most severe consequence of food insecurity.

- **Stunting among children age 5 to 19 years: 40%**

In the southeast region, 20.6% of children were reported to be stunted, while in the northwest and northeast regions 53.2% of children were stunted (NDHS, 2023). Overall, 8% of children in Nigeria were wasted, with the highest prevalence in Delta (15.1%), and the lowest in Enugu (3.9%) (NDHS, 2023).

- **Micronutrient deficiency among children age 5 to 19 years:**

<sup>1</sup> Universal Basic Education commission (UBEC),2024(accessed online)

There is a lack of knowledge and insufficient information regarding the nutritional status of school age children, hindering the formulation of targeted programming priorities in Nigeria. In the southeast, some studies have reported that about 40% of adolescents aged 10-19 years were both anaemic and vitamin A deficient, while 57% had multiple malnutrition indicators. The prevalence of stunting was 9.1% and that of thinness was 14.4%, (NFCMS 2022; Otekunrin et al 2023). Other indicators are as follows:

- **Thinness among children aged 5 to 19 years:** 7.2% girls, 10.4% boys
- **Overweight among children aged 5 to 19 years:** 11.7% girls, 8.1% boys
- **Obesity among children aged 5 to 19 years:** 2.6% girls, 2.3% boys (Global Nutrition report, 2022)

## Design and implementation of school meal programmes

### Description

In 2016, as part of the federal government of Nigeria's vision to 'help the most vulnerable people', a national, locally sourced and sustainable school feeding programme, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), was launched to provide a social safety net for the poor, with the mission to provide a free universal nutritionally balanced hot meal each school day to pupils in all public primary schools. The programme was one of the components of the National Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) - a portfolio of programmes created to deliver socio-economic support to disadvantaged Nigerians across the nation (Adesanmi et al., 2024).

The programme design was based on the five global quality standards of good practice (Bundy et al., 2009). Its multi-sectoral nature ensured the incorporation of education, health, water, sanitation, and agricultural objectives into the programme's framework. A multi-sectoral coordinating team was responsible for developing implementation guidelines, managing and coordinating the implementation of the programme, and supporting state governments. The team also coordinated private sector and developmental partner activities, with desk officers from relevant ministries (e.g. education, health, agriculture, etc.) represented in the team.

In 2019, to sustain the programme, the federal government transferred it to the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development (now the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction) where it continues to be implemented. In May 2023, the programme was moved to an agency under the ministry - the National Social Investment Programmes Agency (NSIPA), which is now responsible for coordinating, implementing, and supervising NSIP in Nigeria.

### Objectives

The NHGSFP aims to support education, nutrition, and social protection for school children, while also promoting the growth of local agriculture and economy. More specifically, it aims to:

- provide significant socio-economic relief to poor and vulnerable households.
- enhance equitable access to and success in education for children from all parts of society.
- address short-term hunger among school children.

- provide a stable and accessible market for local farmers.
- provide decent jobs and incomes to farmers, aggregators, food processors, and cooks, with expected additional multiplier effects for local economic development.

The establishment of institutional structures with clear roles and responsibilities at the federal level was a key factor in its success. The programme is guided by the following principles:

- Small farm engagement;
- Cultural sensitivity;
- Health and nutrition education are embedded within the programme;
- Shared responsibility;
- Stable government funding and sustainability plans;
- Flexibility;
- Multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration;
- Partnerships;
- Community participation.

## Coverage

Population figures in individual states determine the coverage, including the number of pupils, schools, and cooks engaged. For instance, while states such as Kaduna have a population of one million pupils, states like Anambra have a population of just below 200,000 pupils. In 2022, the NHGSFP provided a hot lunch to 9,990,862 (31.4 %) primary school children in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), in 56,715 public primary schools, employing more than 125,000 cooks, 97% of whom are women.

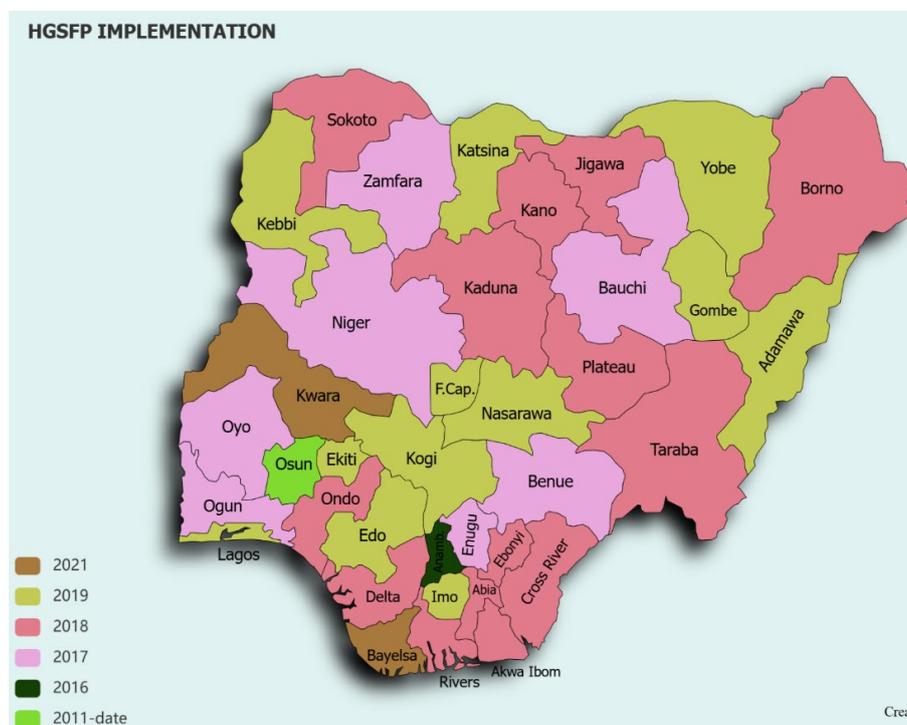


Figure 1: States implementing NHGSFP in Nigeria (Source: paintmaps.com 2024)

## Targeting

The NHGSFP targets pupils in grades 1–3 in all public primary schools. These schools are primarily attended by children from low-income households, making poverty, vulnerability, and food insecurity implicit targeting criteria. During the planning phase of the programme, the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (2015) was the basis for selecting participating states.

## Meal Type

The main modality of the national programme is on-site meals. School children receive one hot meal a day at school, even in very remote areas. The programme focuses on delivering nutritionally balanced menus throughout the school year, with a particular focus on adjusting service delivery to account for seasonality, both in terms of food production and diet diversification, as well as seasonal hunger (from June to August) (Imperial College, 2019).

Each implementing state designs a five-day menu using locally grown foods, considering availability, seasonality, and cost of the food items. The food is prepared either in the homes of the cooks or, in some instances, in cooking centres, and is served to the pupils in their classrooms during break time (mid-morning).

## Nutritional norms

The NHGSFP has defined nutritional targets for the meals with guidelines specifying that children should consume at least four of the seven food groups daily. The seven food groups are as follows:

- Grains, roots and tubers,
- Legumes and nuts,
- Dairy products (milk, yoghurt, cheese),
- Flesh foods (meat, fish, poultry and liver/organ meats),
- Eggs,
- Vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables,
- Other fruits and vegetables.

The guidelines also suggest providing 50% Recommended Nutrient Intake (RNI) for protein and prioritising micronutrients (iron, iodine, zinc, vitamin A, folate and vitamin C) due to the high burden of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in Nigeria. Additionally, it was decided that the menu designed by each state should provide 30% of energy and 30% of fat as defined in the NHGSFP guidelines.

*Table 3: Energy and Nutrient Intake Targets for NHGSFP*

<b>Nutrient per day</b>	<b>RNI<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>NHGSF Nutrient Target</b>
Energy (kcal)	1871	561
Protein (g)	21	11
Fat (g)	62	19
Iron (mg)	8	4
Iodine (µg)	105	53
Vitamin A (µg RE)	475	238
Vitamin C (mg)	33	17
Zinc (mg)	5	3
Folate (µg DFE)	250	125

Sources: Energy RNI from FAO/WHO/UNU; protein RNI from WHO/FAO/UNU; fat RNI from FAO; and micronutrients RNI from WHO/FAO.

## Food procurement

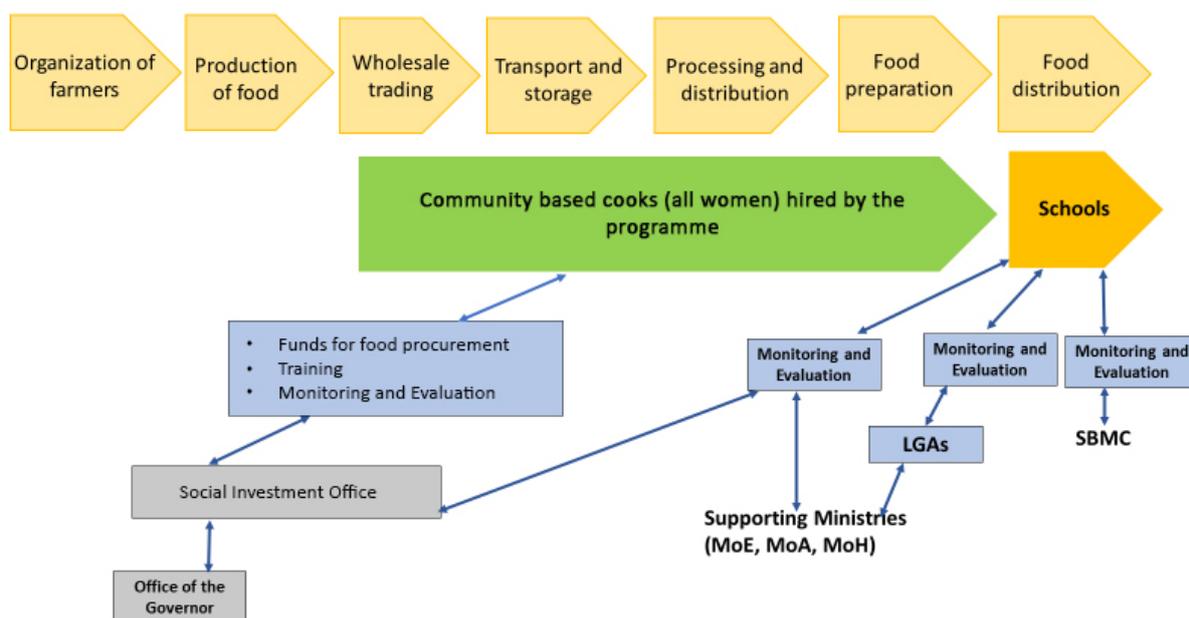


Figure 2: National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) supply chain. Ministry of Education (MOE), Local Government Areas (LGAs), School based management committee (SBMC), Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)

The NHGSFP applies a decentralised model for food procurement (Figure 2), where cooks are responsible for purchasing food items from markets. However, in some states, food items are aggregated. This aggregation model has increased production levels and revenue for small-scale farmers involved in the programme. The primary role of aggregators is to establish linkages with local farmers, negotiate pricing within budget, and facilitate storage, processing, and distribution, ensuring that the required food items are delivered to the cooks in a timely and safe manner. Aggregation is limited to protein items, such as eggs, beef, chicken, and fish, baked products (e.g., bread rolls, buns, or high-energy biscuits as appropriate) and yoghurt/milk. Aggregation is only done through competent and designated associations. To date, 200,000 smallholder farmers are linked to the programme, supplying locally sourced ingredients. This translates to 813 cattle, 41,000 chickens, 7.5 million eggs and 98.6 metric tons of fish procured, prepared, and distributed each week. To achieve the objective of increasing agricultural production, states have ensured that an efficient system of aggregating food items – especially those susceptible to high cost and perishability – has been established, while also providing opportunities for cooks and farmers living near primary schools to be directly engaged.

## Legal Framework and Public Policy Evolution

School feeding in Nigeria, at the inception, was guided by two main instruments: Universal Basic Education Act, 2004 (UBEC, 2005) and the National School Health Policy (2006). However, in 2023, the NHGSFP was developed and approved by the Federal Government. The policy is guided by a series of instruments (details in Annex 3), as follows:

- The Nigeria Vision 20:2020;
- The National Development Plan (NDP) 2021 – 2025;

- The National Policy on Education (2014);
- Ministerial Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022;
- The Federal School Health Policy (2006);
- The National Policy on Food and Nutrition in Nigeria (NPFN) (2016);
- The National Multi-Sectoral Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition (2021 – 2025);
- The National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) 2016-2020;
- The National Social Protection Policy 2021-2025 (NSPP 2021);
- The Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP) 2016 – 2020;
- The Agriculture Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (AFSNS) 2016 – 2025;
- The National Gender Policy (2021).

## Costs of Implementation

Since 2016, \$1.3 billion USD has been provided in every budget cycle for the NSIP in the country. Of that amount, approximately 20% is dedicated to the school feeding programme.

*Table 4: National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) costs of implementation*

Number of children	9,990,862
Average cost of a meal	100 NGN/child/day
Cost of Raw Material	nil
Labour Costs	nil
Family participation	in kind (firewood, water, manual labour)
State budget per child and meal	varies by state
Government budget per child and meal	100 NGN/child/day
Number of teaching days in one academic year	180
Number of school meal days in one academic year	180

*NGN: Nigeria Naira (1 dollar USD = 1580 NGN in December 2024)*

## Financing

The costs for the programme are borne entirely by the federal government, at a cost of NGN 100 (0.06 US cents) per child per day. To support the government’s financial inclusion goal, the funding strategy is focused on ensuring that all beneficiaries (cooks and aggregators) receive funds directly into their dedicated bank accounts. Each Individual bank account is verified by the Nigeria Inter-Bank Settlement Systems Plc to minimise fraud and achieve a transparent and trackable funds disbursement process, while ensuring that services are paid for promptly. The federal government disburses payments directly into the beneficiary accounts according to the payment schedule prepared for each feeding cycle. The feeding cycle ranges from ten to twenty days, prior to commencement of feeding. A state is eligible to receive funds for a twenty-day feeding cycle, provided they had 70% of the cooks verified and approved. State budgets are developed to support the administrative, operational, and financial aspects of the programme to expand the scope.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

The programme subscribes to the theory that, for government investment to be sustainable, it must follow the path of the five global standards, with implementation design and decisions made by the states (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2020). A key assumption of the

programme is that the NHGSFP is owned and led by the state, with key influencers including the Executive Governor. Secondly, the management of the programme is based on the theory that for school feeding to be relevant and effective in Nigeria, and to build sustainable outcomes, programme monitoring must be based on data generated within state systems, through self-assessment, learning, formative evaluation, and through regular monitoring. The processes of gathering data, building evidence, reviewing and communicating evidence, and making decisions based on evidence are core to the programme’s management activities.

The M&E strategy has two main objectives to assess through the programme:

- Improved literacy rates of public primary school pupils (Primary 1-3)
- Improved income of cooks and farmers participating in the NHGSFP

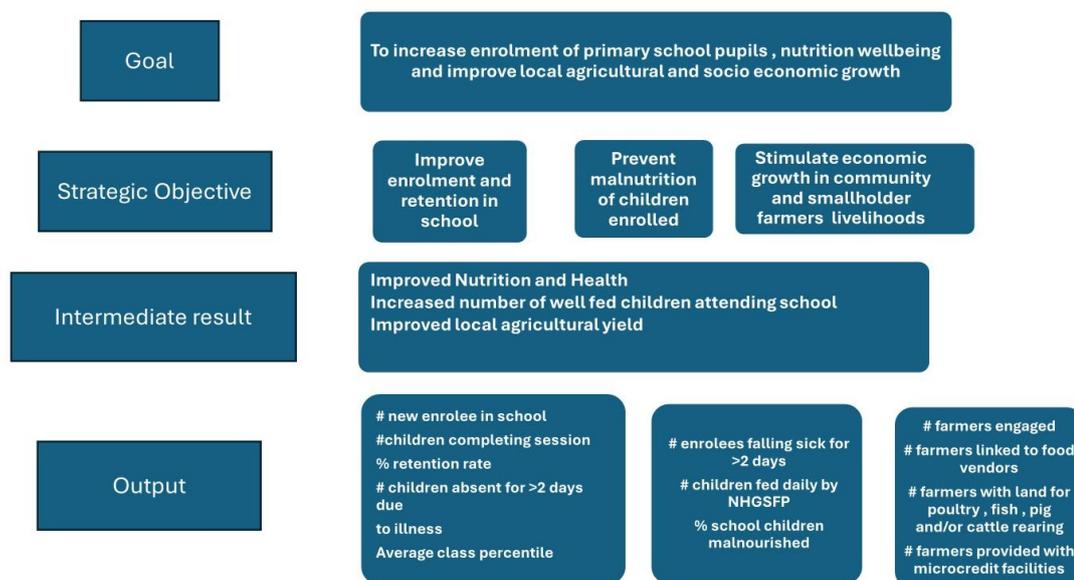


Figure 3: Results framework for National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (Source: FMHADMSD, 2023)

## Lessons learned and best practices

The Nigerian school feeding programme, one of the fastest growing programmes regionally, has increased from 1.05 million children fed in 2017 to 9.9 million in 2022. Four key principles were identified that needed to be integrated with the programme design:

- **Building Transparency and Accountability into the Programme Design:** The Nigerian procurement model is based on forward contracts that are public, overseen at the federal and state levels, and leave a paper trail of bank accounts, all the way through from when caterers collect the food from the state distribution points.
- **Building Equity as a Deliberate Priority:** The programme is designed to be inclusive and universal (i.e., not targeted) to reach all children regardless of geography, income level, ethnicity, religion, or gender. The NHGSFP, currently covers all children in Grades 1–3 across all public primary schools in Nigeria.
- **Promoting Good Nutrition by Ensuring Diet Quality and Sustainability:** Beyond fighting hunger, the NHGSFP ensures that the nutritional (dietary) needs of growing children are met. The diet is based on locally available, culturally appropriate, and climate-smart food choices. The government has adopted the “School Menu Planner

PLUS” (developed by the Partnership for Child Development, the World Food Programme and AUDA/NEPAD) to align dietary standards and school menus to locally available foods.

- **Boosting the local economy:** The programme provides stable and predictable markets for local farmers, creates jobs at multiple levels, and promotes a culture of trade and entrepreneurship.

## Challenges

Some challenges encountered during the implementation of the NHGSFP are outlined below:

- **Funding:** One of the key challenges is the inconsistency in the availability and timely release of funding for the programme, which results in frequent disruption of the feeding cycle.
- **Programme Oversight and Sustainability:** In some states, the failure to domicile the programme in the highest political office at the state did not signal strong political will of the leadership at the highest level of government, hindering effective oversight of this multisectoral venture.
- **Multisectoral Engagement:** States that lack multisectoral representation in their coordinating units face challenges in implementing the programme.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning:** Limited resources for routine operations and monitoring and evaluation continue to be a challenge. The programme still has issues with reconciling state specific data; the validation of pupil enrolment, cook access, and school participant; hindering the programme’s effectiveness. Accurate data collection is critical in programme design.

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## Related resources and data sources

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# Annexes

## Annex 1

The UBE guidelines implemented in 2014, mandates the curriculum to include English, Mathematics, Nigerian language, basic science and technology, religion and national values, and cultural and creative arts, Arabic language (optional). Pre-vocational studies (home economics, agriculture, and entrepreneurship) and French language are introduced in grade 4.

Nigeria's national policy on education stipulates that the language of instruction for the first three years should be the "indigenous language of the child or the language of his/her immediate environment", most commonly Hausa, Ibo, or Yoruba. This policy may, however, not always be followed at schools throughout the country, and instruction may instead be delivered in English. English is commonly the language of instruction for the last three years of elementary school.

The Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) take place nationwide in June each year and usually last for 2 weeks. Students are expected to take a minimum of ten subjects and a maximum of thirteen. Students must achieve passes in six subjects, including English and mathematics, to pass the BECE.

## Annex 2

Population in 2022: 218,541,212

Population 5-15 yrs in 2022: 62,806,509

Gross Domestic Product per Capita (2022): \$2,162.6

Population ages 0 to 14 years in 2019 (% of total): 43.69%

Employment in agriculture in 2021 (% of total employment): 35.21%

Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021/2022: 0.257

Under-fives suffering from stunting (moderate and severe) in 2015 -2019 (%): 37%

Number of Primary School in : 63,414

Primary School Gross Enrolment Ratio in 2015/2016: 87.1%

Primary School Net Enrolment in 2019: 19,541,909

**Primary school gross enrolment in 2019: 22,384,755**

**Primary school gross enrolment for male: 11,618,213**

**Primary school gross enrolment for female: 10,766,542**

## Annex 3

- i. The Nigeria Vision 20:2020: The Vision is to ensure that regarding education, all boys and girls complete a full course of basic education. The Economic Recovery and Growth Plan 2017-2020: The ERGP aims to increase social inclusion by strengthening the social safety net for the poor and vulnerable by implementing and expanding vulnerable-targeted social safety net programmes, the focus is to be on the agricultural industry, and on investing in health and education to bridge the skills gap in the economy.
- ii. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2021 – 2025: aims to maximise the country's potential in all sectors of the economy to achieve long-term, holistic, and inclusive national development. The NDP specifically mentions the NHGSFP and includes a strategy to "ensure effective delivery of comprehensive packages of educational, health, and nutritional interventions through the School Feeding and Health Programme and similar programmes" to combat malnutrition.
- iii. The National Policy on Education (2014): Emphasises the importance of education as an investment in economic, social, and political development, as well as a tool for the empowerment of the poor and socially marginalised groups, as well as the development of a skilled labour force.
- iv. Ministerial Education Strategic Plan (MESP) 2018 – 2022: Is based on three result areas: access, quality, and systems strengthening, and it has ten pillars. The MESP recommends, among other things, the provision of school meals to guarantee that all Out-of-School Children (OOSC) are enrolled in basic education within four years. The goal of "A meal per day provided to all children in schools" is set by the OOSC Action Plan for the Federal level and is to be accomplished by 2022.
- v. The Federal School Health Policy (2006): Pursues the goals of enhancing the quality of health in the school community, and of creating an enabling environment for inter-sectoral partnership in the promotion of a child friendly school environment through the School Health Programme.
- vi. The National Policy on Food and Nutrition in Nigeria (NPFN) (2016): Establishes a comprehensive set of strategies to address malnutrition and food insecurity in Nigeria at all levels, including the individual, household, community, and national. At least four of the policy's ten objectives can be directly supported by a comprehensive school health and nutrition programme including: (Objective 2) decreased undernutrition among infants and children, adolescents, and women of reproductive age; (Objective 3) decreased micronutrient deficiency disorders, particularly among vulnerable groups; (Objective 4) increased nutrition knowledge among the general population; and (Objective 10) universal access to nutrition-sensitive social protection.
- viii. The National Multi-Sectoral Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition (2021 – 2025): Builds directly on the NPFN and outlines plans of action for enhancing the nutritional status of all Nigerians with a focus on the most vulnerable populations. The States/FCT/LGAs are expected to cover 51.3 percent of the total cost for the plan's implementation over a five-year period, while the federal government (11.8 percent), development partners (29.3 percent), and the organised private sector (7.5 percent) are expected to cover the remaining costs.
- viii. The National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) 2016-2020: Aims to reduce poverty and provide all citizens with a dignified life.
- ix. The National Social Protection Policy 2021-2025 (NSPP 2021): This policy maps existing social protection programmes and assesses them against predefined criteria. It identifies

eleven major gaps, including (i) insufficient coverage, (ii) insufficient governance structure, (iii) insufficient financing, (iv) systems, capacity, and linkages to states, and (x) an insufficient legislative framework. In terms of coverage, the NSPP 2021 expressly states that children in Basic 4-6 and private primary schools are not covered by the NHGSFP.

x. The Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP) 2016 – 2020: Builds on the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) 2011-2015, identifying its accomplishments and challenges, and proposing strategies to close key gaps. The APP seeks to direct policy instruments toward stimulating agricultural production on a long-term basis, as well as stimulating supply and demand for agricultural products by facilitating linkages between producers and off takers. Two of the interventions proposed under the Food, Consumption, and Nutrition Security sub-theme are to make nutritious foods available at the local level through school feeding programmes... and to raise nutrition awareness.

ix. The Agriculture Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (AFSNS) 2016 – 2025: Seeks to maximise the agriculture sector's potential to provide sustainable food security and nutrition, by mainstreaming nutrition into agricultural policies, programmes, and value chains. The AFSNS suggests, among other things, that smallholder farmers be connected with institutional markets like school feeding programmes, to strengthen social safety nets and resilience for vulnerable groups through food systems (priority 4).

xi. The National Gender Policy (NGP) (2021): Establishes seven strategic objectives, three of which can be supported in principle by the NHGSFP. In fact, the NGP emphasises the importance and increased coverage of economic empowerment (priority area ii) with respect to the employment of cooks and potential market for women farmers, and human development (priority area iii) with respect to health, survival, and nutrition