

ATE Report: Impacts of the School Feeding Programme (SFP)

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1. Executive Summary

The aim of this research was to investigate the impact of the SFP on the families of children attending Karbo primary and on the children themselves. Interviews were carried out with parents, children and other stakeholders related to the PTA and SFP and the findings are summarised in this report. The report highlights that despite increased work load on parents and grandparents due to children attending school more, they value the long term implications of education and short term benefits of the lunches enough to manage domestic and farming workloads in adapted ways. Patterns of feeding in the home relating to distribution, amount given and spending has also changed. The report also explores broader issues related to the SFP such as the decision-making ability for change and improvement of the programme from parents' perspectives.

2. Introduction

This report was undertaken with the aim of investigating the impacts of the ATE SFP at Karbo Primary. The BMI and attendance rates of the children are already recorded by ATE in order to monitor the direct educational and nutritional impact the programme is having on the children. This research therefore, focuses on the wider impacts the SFP is having upon the children, their life at home and their families. The research was carried out with no prior assumptions or hypotheses relating to potential findings and so the research also involves interviews with teachers and PTA executive members in order to get a holistic insight into the SFP and stakeholders involved.

3. Research Methodology

The research took a qualitative approach to reflect the investigation's aim of gaining opinions, perspectives and views of a range of stakeholders involved in the programme. Quantitative figures have also been collated and used from answers given in the interviews to give readers a sense of impact. These figures however are approximate as they are derived from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups where questions and answers were flexible, mothers and fathers were sometimes interviewed together and sometimes apart and at times the heads of different families were interviewed together. Similarly, interviews with parents were based on who could be located in the villages, meaning the parents interviewed are not necessarily a fully representative sample.

3.1 Children's Focus Groups: Children at Karbo Primary School were interviewed in focus groups at the school, with each group consisting of 6-8 students. Two focus groups from each class, P1-P6 were carried out with the aim of having half boys and half girls in each group. Focus groups were performed in a setting familiar to the participants in order to ease the students whilst talking to an outsider, and to better create dialogue between the children. It should be noted that this did have negative implications at times, since it was apparent that at times students were prone to copying one another's answers.

3.2 Parents Semi-Structured Interviews: Parents were interviewed through informal semi-structured interviews where a range of open-ended questions relating to the SFP and more generally, the school, were asked. They were approached during the afternoon after the farming day, outside their

compounds. The interviews consisted of speaking to mothers, fathers and grandparents alone, to having either both parents or a range of family members present. The dynamics of this may have had an impact on how the participants responded but where possible, observations of such dynamics have been noted. 8 families/parents were interviewed in Tori and 10 in Yatori, the two main villages with children attending the primary school.

3.3 Other Stakeholders: Teachers, Cooks and PTA Executives were also interviewed on a one to one basis. It should be noted that it is likely the headmistress had spoken to all such stakeholders in advance in order to manage what was said in the interviews, which again may have skewed some of the findings.

4. Findings

4.1 Focus Group Findings with Children

4.1.1. School: 80% of children in all classes answered that they are attending school more now that there are school lunches, with the exception of P6 (the oldest students) where only 50% answered that they were attending school more. General consensus in all focus groups was that the lunches led to a vast improvement in their learning, including comments such as: 'increases my concentration', 'now I am not in pain or dizzy at school', 'I used to sleep in class, be quiet and hungry but now I concentrate, socialise and contribute'. For the majority of students it was mainly the parents' choice as to whether they attended school or not, however in P5 and P6 half the students saw it as their choice as to attend school. This did vary between gender where those answering that it was their choice were predominantly male.

4.1.2. Work at home: Common work the children do/used to do at home includes farming, herding cattle and taking care of the goats by the male students and sweeping, fetching water, tidying compounds, sewing nuts and washing bowls by the female students. Now that the majority of children attend school more, their previous work at home has altered. The trend amongst the younger children (P1-P2) is that they still do some of their chores but now they do them before they go to school and for a minority of them, at the weekends. The remainder of the work is taken on by the parents, older siblings and a large proportion by the grandparents. The headmistress supported this, mentioning that often children arrive late to school, especially in farming season as they have been helping at home. The older children (P3-P5) however, still do some of their domestic and farm work but tend to do it after school or at weekends, with P6 all answering *only* at weekends. Approximately 15% of the students used to look after younger siblings before they started attending school more, now it is notably the mothers and grandparents that have taken on this responsibility.

4.1.3. Food: Amongst the younger children (P1-P3) approximately 70% of the focus group children get less food at home now than they did before school lunches started. The rest get the same amount of food when they get home as they used to, with two respondents in P3 however, saying they get nothing but school lunches now. It was apparent that the children that get less now tend to have younger siblings that don't go to school or other siblings who don't get school lunches and subsequently these siblings get an extra share at home. The children did however, believe that they were getting a lot more on average during the day than before the SFP started, with 60% of the

children formerly only getting one meal per day in the evening. They were subsequently happy to have slightly less food at home now so other siblings not receiving lunch could have more. Despite some children mentioning the competitive element between siblings for food, more children indicated that this competitive element has been reduced. This was taken further by one child, saying that some food even goes to the animals at home now that he is being fed at school. The older children however (P4-P6), all had lunch before the SFP started and only a few, notably females, get less at home now that they get school lunches, with one commenting that now her parents get more at home. The majority of P4-P6 saw the question of 'how much food they get now' as funny as they see it as their decision on how much food they receive. It became evident that within the natural family hierarchy, they got more food at home than younger siblings because of age and were generally treated as adults.

There was a mixed response regarding children taking food home. P1 all responded saying they didn't take food home however P2 all responded saying they did *sometimes* take food home, half of P3 and P4 *sometimes* took food home and the older classes P5 and P6 said they never took food home. This is supported later in the report.

4.1.4. Concerns: The students were all asked whether they had any worries or concerns about any member of their families. Half of the students responded with comments such as parents 'are actually happier as they have less stress to feed us and happy I am getting an education'. Half the students however expressed concern with the amount of work relating to their parents and grandparents. Two children also mentioned they know their parents worry about paying fees.

4.2. Semi-Structured Interviews with Parents (and Grandparents)

4.2.1. School and benefits: 65% of the parents interviewed said that their children were going to school more now that they get school lunches, 12% said they only enrolled because of the lunches and the remaining 23% said their children were going to school the same amount. One grandmother in a family where the parents were in the south working, mentioned that before school lunches they did not attend school because of caning issues but now the lunches provide a greater incentive to go. Numerous parents now find it easier to get their children to want to go school due to the lunch incentive but at times it appeared that the children were the ones in control of whether they went or not. This very much depended on how much value the parents placed on education.

The benefits parents saw for their children included: decreased hunger pains, happier in general and happy to go to school, increased energy, concentration, ability to learn and generally increased levels of health. The majority of parents saw a current benefit to them and their family as feeling less stress and pressure to provide food and generally having a healthier and happier family. 30% of the respondents also saw the potential of the long-term benefits if their children can get educated and support them in the future.

4.2.2. Work in the home/farm: When parents were asked if they take on anymore work now that their children are attending school more, 55% automatically said that it is worth it as they value their children's education more. 30% noted that the children still have to do the work but do it at different time of the day, before or after school. This was strongly supported by the children's responses, highlighting a changing pattern in how and when children do domestic and farm work. A few parents did emphasise that there was a labour deficiency in the home now that the children

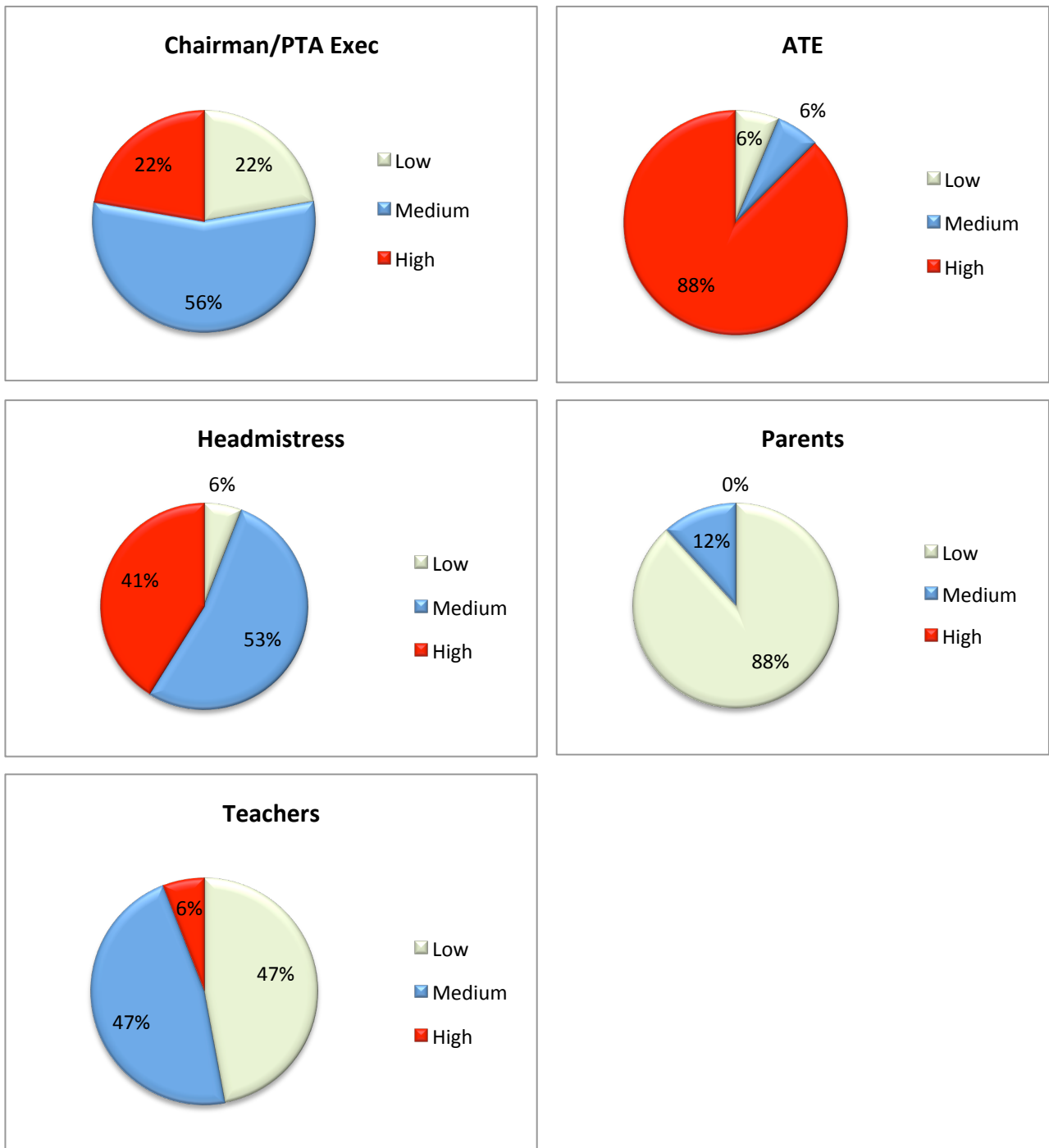
spent more time at school and that the parents did feel over worked. Despite this very few parents wanted to go into detail about any of the work they have taken on but some did highlight that some grandparents have now adopted the children's work and looking after younger children.

4.2.3 Food and finance: 95% of parents believed they spent less money on food either through not spending as much on food in the home or not having to give children money to buy food. 50% of parents acknowledged that their children did sometimes bring home food to share with the rest of the family. Where this did happen it was shared with younger siblings, grandparents or in one case a single mother. Again this correlated with the children's response in an ad hoc pattern of children bringing food home. Where it did occur both the parents and children implied it was if they had any spare, rather than a planned effort.

4.2.4 PTA and parents decision-making ability: The PTA and how decisions are made with regards to the SFP was explored as it links directly to ATE's philosophy of being community-led. All but one parent in the sample attend the PTA and it is mainly mothers that attend rather than the fathers as fathers are usually working on the farms. There are some vulnerable groups however that are unable to attend; one single mother no longer had the time when her husband died and other parents spoke of disabled parents, parents living a long distance away and parents working in the south to earn money that are also unable to attend. There is also awareness that some very poor parents don't attend in order to avoid paying the school levees and a comment was made (possibly just a rumour in the community) that if you miss a PTA then you have to pay a 5 Cedi fee. A high proportion of parents did not want to speculate on other parents' activities but all were conscious that in farming season it is very hard to attend, especially during the day when PTA meetings are usually held, and that some parents won't attend if they don't believe it is worthwhile.

All parents believed the PTA was an equal platform where parents got an equal say, however, numerous parents did say they just listened and agreed to suggestions. The dynamic of the PTA was explored further and it appeared that the PTA exec and teachers are viewed as 'superiors'. Although likely to be a product of the hierarchy of traditional communities, it does have implications for the PTA being the decision-making body of the SFP since, although all the parents are treated equally, they only see their role as passive support. Using a scale that indicated low power/ability to make decisions and initiate change/improvement for the SFP to high power/ability, they were all asked to specify where different stakeholders belonged on this scale (indicated in pie charts below). The most striking finding is that parents believe they have no power to make any change or improvement, supported by comments such as 'parents are lower than low on the scale', 'we are low because we are given so much help it doesn't feel like we have the right to make decisions' and most of them even laughed when asked to place themselves on the scale. One family even responded that ATE, the teachers, head teacher and chairman all had high power if the parents supported them but when asked about their decision-making power as parents, they still believed it was low. The majority of parents saw power and ability to make change as directly related to money and when asked why they saw themselves as having low ability in the situation, half responded that they could only *support* what ATE and 'superiors' suggested and that they 'have no ideas to be able to advance or change anything'.

Perception of decision-making and change ability of the SFP by parents:



4.2.5. *Improvements:* All parents were asked what they thought could be done to improve the SFP. Around 50% of the parents found the question very difficult and could not answer it but amongst those that did there was a common theme that every parent should help support the programme and bring some type of ingredient to make it more sustainable. Although this may not be logistically feasible it highlighted that a) parents wanted to be able to contribute more to the programme as they were incredibly grateful and b) that there were slight fears that the programme would not last forever. This fear of ATE going was apparent in a lot of the interviews. Other improvement suggestions consisted of; paying the watchman more as general consensus was that this was a great

development in the programme, increasing monitoring to avoid scams, ensuring all parents pay the fees.

4.3. Semi-Structured Interviews with Teachers, PTA and Cooks

Brief interviews were carried out with teachers, PTA executives and the cooks to get a holistic picture of the stakeholders involved. There is a high likelihood here that the headmistress had spoken to these stakeholders in advance so results are fairly inconclusive. In interview with the PTA chairman, a teacher even turned up to listen and contribute, meaning he may not have spoken his mind. We were unable to find the chairman to interview again.

4.3.1. Teachers: The teachers have all seen a significant change in the children. Where they used to sleep during class, complain of feeling sick and were unable to concentrate, it has been significantly reduced. Teachers have subsequently found it easier to teach and reduced time telling children off. As they get fed at lunch however, there are still concentration and hunger issues in the morning, with one teacher recommending that a SFP development could include giving milo or biscuits in the morning. There are still cases where attendance drops during farming season and during this time more children come to school late. Regarding their view on the PTA, the headmistress commented that 'the PTA has no power to change things' but although this is an assumption I believe this was said to give the impression that everything is under control as all other sources indicate that the PTA do have the power to change things. Attendance-wise, the headmistress was aware that there are regular people that cannot attend: those that are in the south to work, are disabled, too old, those that don't care or are working (since PTAs are held during the day) or even children not being represented there as they do not have parents.

4.3.2. PTA: The chairman, Albert, was elected by the parents and the PTA treasurer, John Gandar, was put forward for election by the headmistress then voted in by parents (note: his child has left Karbo primary school but he is finishing his term in office). If something needs to be discussed on PTA the chairman says that parents always go to Mary first who then goes to Albert. This is supported by parents where 90% said they would go to the head or teachers to discuss an issue before the chairman. The treasurer believes that the only people that don't attend are people that refuse to pay fees. He has even seen disabled people attend, so believes everyone could if they wanted to. When asking the chairman and treasurer about the decision-making ability of different stakeholders they saw their role as only bringing issues to the PTA and that it is the parents who have the high decision making ability, along with ATE. This is contrary to how the parents view their position but does support the view that the PTA is an equal and democratic platform. The chairman's initial reaction when starting the interview was that 'nothing is wrong!' indicating a anxiety mirrored by numerous parents that the programme may be stopped at some point. He had a strong concern that if ATE leave they will not get the government programme to come to the school now the parents have declined them and that the school needs a back up plan.

4.3.3. Cooks: The headmistress appointed the cooks and all are parents to children at the school. They don't see any challenges to their role but are very concerned that ATE may leave and they cant carry on the programme. Subsequently they believe that parents should contribute to the programme or that a back up plan needs to be put in place.

5. Findings Summary

5.1 Food: The lunches are bringing significant benefits to the children in terms of an increased ability to concentrate and learn as well as increased attendance levels and nutritional intake. This is subsequently improving the learning environment at school and enabling a decrease in pressure and stress for parents to provide food. There are also some changing patterns at home regarding food distribution as those siblings not receiving lunches tend to be getting a greater share at home. There is a large amount of children taking food home, however, this is on an ad hoc basis and I believe it is not planned by parents.

5.2 Domestic and farm work: The parents and grandparents have taken on a significant amount of work that the attending children used to do and on the whole they are happy to do so. They value the food itself, its impact on their children's education, the reduced pressure in providing food and most notably, the long-term benefits improved education will have for them and their family. There are also changing patterns and routines at home regarding when the children work, with younger children waking up earlier to do chores and older children doing them after school or at weekends.

5.3 Fear of programme ending: There is a common fear throughout the majority of adults that ATE may not be around forever. Numerous parents are concerned there is no back-up plan in case the support from ATE ends. This may require ATE speaking to the parents at a PTA meeting about the long term goals and plans of ATE. At the same time as wanting a back-up plan, many of the parents want to be able to contribute in some way to ensure the programme's sustainability highlighting that there is potential to increase involvement and accountability of parents

5.4 PTA: The PTA is set up and operated as a democratic institution where parents have equal say in electing the executive and making decisions. The exec and teachers all view it in this way and it would seem that decisions have been made in this way by parents. The parents, although partaking in these decisions do not overtly see themselves as the decision makers. They are not necessarily disempowered as their behaviour in advancing the programme suggests otherwise. I believe they are able to, and do in fact make change, but they are not conscious of it. In this sense it may be beneficial to explicitly talk to the parents at the PTA about ATE's community-led approach and vision of how the programme should work, simply explaining what the parents have the ability to do in relation to ATE. This may then aid in the wider picture of parents realising the power they have as a collective in making change.

6. Researcher's Note

The ATE SFP is an amazing project that I thoroughly enjoyed working on. The communities and parents are incredibly grateful for the support in the short term but also the implications the programme will have in the long term. I strongly believe that there is large potential to get the parents further involved and accountable for the programme and future work that ATE may embark on. The programme is significantly changing the lives of the children and it is highly visible in their attitude and enthusiasm for school.

With the development of ATE I believe that there are further research possibilities such as looking at whether the most vulnerable children in society are benefiting from the programme since there is a high likelihood that orphans, single-parent families, disabled-parent families, etc. are unable to afford to let the children go to school despite lunches. Similarly it would be interesting to log PTA attendance to look at the equality of the PTA in terms of the parents that are consistently unable to or who don't attend. In the long term it would be interesting to evaluate the impacts of the SFP in terms of numbers of students going on to secondary school and University to see if long term patterns are changing.

I want to thank Sarah and Habib very much for having me and letting me be a part of a wonderful experience and fantastic work ATE is carrying out in Lawra.