

The challenges and contexts of the Lokaleng School Feeding Scheme in the North West Province, South Africa

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Abstract

School Feeding Scheme Programmes (SFSP's) are globally present, especially in countries where child poverty and malnutrition reflect a crisis. This paper evaluates the Lokaleng Primary School feeding scheme programme in Mmabatho, North West Province, South Africa. It serves one of the poorest villages in the area, with a mean of six dependents per family, most of whom are unemployed and uneducated. This has resulted in food insecurity in the village. After outlining the schemes' challenges and benefits, the paper contextualises the schemes challenges by suggesting a more holistic and comprehensive approach focussed on the surrounding and extra-school conditions. A qualitative approach with in-depth one-on-one interviews was used. Study participants included schoolteachers, food suppliers (handlers), and parents of pupils. Data was analysed and presented using themes obtained from participants' responses. Most respondents found that the feeding scheme does benefit pupils educationally, with increased school enrolments and attendance, and improved academic performance as Maijo (2018) concurs. Other studies however show mixed results when it comes to pupils' physiological conditions, enrolment, or decreased dropout rates, and yet others show no correlation to such aspects. Difficult challenges remain in breaking the burden of poverty that families are exposed to, for which this paper gives some suggestions. One challenge identified in this study was the late delivery of food, resulting in irregular food supply to the school. The study makes baseline suggestions for the relevant government department, and for civics, to contribute to ensuring a more effective and sustainable school feeding programme.

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Biographical notes

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DEDICATION

Sheila Manka, who passed on too early, had amazing tenacity. Bianca's dedication reads:

"This work is dedicated to the memory of my beloved research supervisor Sheila. I am forever grateful to have had the privilege of learning under your guidance. Your kindness, ever-present smile, and willingness to help made every challenge seem surmountable. Because of you, I discovered the joy and rigour of research—a gift I will carry with me always. Thank you for believing in me, teaching me, and inspiring me. You are deeply missed, and your legacy lives on in every step of my journey" (Bianca and Kiran).



Introduction

School feeding programmes seek to address a problem arising out of poverty, malnutrition and unemployment in developing countries. Such programmes are a form of social protection to enhance educational experiences of needy primary school learners, while promoting punctual school attendance, reducing hunger and improving concentration. The aim is to foster general health by delivering meals or snacks to school children (Altman, 2009; Wang and Fawzi, 2020). Such programmes, apart from other independent local and international donor feeding programmes, are run within the context of a national and board school reform programme, and with local communities that need to be fully involved and take responsibility for them. Such involvement increases programme success and sustainability.

Both Gunderson (2003) and Drake, Lazrak, Fernandes, Chu, Kim, Ryckembusch, Nourozi, Bundy and Burbano (2020) argue that such programmes are significant for the nutritional and socio-economic status of the target group, which should be the most underserved food insecure areas, with relatively low rates of school attendance. After the election of democratic government in 1994, the National School Nutrition Programme was introduced as a presidential lead project, under the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The South African government, with the assistance of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) or through Home Based Models, also provides poor schools with daily meals, for learners in poor socio-economic areas (DoE, 2011; National School Nutrition Program, DBE, 2023).

The Health Department initiated a 'Primary School Programme' (1994-2003), after which the Basic Education Department (DBE) took over and renamed it the 'National School Nutrition Programme' (NSNP, 2004). The aim was to enhance learning capacity through school feeding, increasing nutrition in schools, and promotion of sustainable food production. The shift was from a milk component of biscuits or peanut butter sandwiches for identified primary schools in 2004, to providing daily cooked meals to primary and secondary schools (DOE, 2011; DBE, National School Nutrition Program, 2023).

Every province has its own menu guide that states what children should be served on weekdays. The management of the meal provision is guided by a national manual of procedures, with a monthly report required from the education district-level authorities. Records are kept in the district office with regular provincial progress meetings that are supposed to take place in the regional office. However, due to a 'lack of funds' in North West Province, meetings are not held between provincial and district educational authorities. Monthly reports that are supposed to be submitted to the districts are usually not readily available, due to the lack of a filing system. South Africa uses two food procurement models: a centralised one sees ingredients purchased and delivered to schools, based on a service level agreement between suppliers and the Provincial Education Department. The decentralised model sees schools receiving provincial funds to procure services themselves. Four of the nine provinces, including North West, use the latter model.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) issues a public tender order to supply food to schools, guided by the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework (Act no. 5 of 2000) for people who, historically, have been disadvantaged in terms of their gender, race or disability. The school committee consists of the principle, teachers and school governing body members, and is expected to oversee daily meal provision and monitor the programme's financial management.

Justification of the study

South African poverty levels have increased and are worsening annually, especially since 2011, and food scarcity has increased. The World Bank (2020) and UN (UNHDI and Development Report, 2020) respectively report 50% and 20% of South Africans (12 to 30 million people) are poor or poverty stricken. In 2005, school children in Lokaleng showed signs of malnutrition. Most are underweight and a majority of their families experience food insecurity. 75% of the children in Lokaleng Primary School are from disadvantaged backgrounds, and



most parents are unemployed. Most households depend on government social grants as a source of income (Tladi, 2019). Before the feeding scheme was established at the school, it had a high percentage of absenteeism as learners experienced hunger at home and at school. Lack of transportation contributed to absenteeism, as learners with empty stomachs had to walk long distances to school. Thus, the low enrolment rates and poor academic performances, and increasing chances of them falling into a poverty trap (Tladi, 2019). This paper investigates the challenges of the school feeding programme at Lokaleng Primary School, in addressing the food insecurity of vulnerable children. It also seeks to understand the impact of the school feeding scheme programme on learners, to identify challenges faced by the programme at the school, and to revisit possible broader frameworks and forces involved in these challenges.

The feeding scheme programme does broadly contribute to better nourishment and health for learners. Better nutrition means better physical and mental development, which leads to more productivity (Engelbrecht, 2015). The programme is therefore necessary, as it improves both the learners' school attendance and their academic performance, but such schemes must be contextualised to account for their failures and successes in the short and long term.

Literature review

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not just an absence of disease. The literature echoes this (Branca and Ferrari, 2002; SA Medical Research Council, 2008; Chakraborty and Jayaram, 2016). In 1959 the United Nations included health as a basic human right (UN website, 2024).

The NSNP has three aims: to feed children in schools; to provide education on nutrition; and to cultivate food gardens. Yet 96% of its budget goes to feeding, which results in the latter two aims being under-funded. The literature is positive about its reach, with possible spin offs for food production, for learning, cognitive abilities and brain capacity (Chhetri, Ghimmire, Prasad, Dura, Lamichane and Chhetri, 2024; Michael and Moore, 1995), for nutrition uptake (Jomma, McDonnell and Probart, 2011), and more recently for academic performance (Wang, 2020; Isaac, 2021).

Mabasa and Themane's (2000) earlier study of the challenges of stakeholder participation and lack of knowledge of feeding programmes is supported by Kaaur's (2021) more recent finding that school feeding schemes in India, Brazil and South Africa all face challenges of high numbers of school children and their high drop-out and repetition rates. South Africa and Tanzania experience challenges related to School Governing Body (SGB) members failing to encourage parental involvement in the programme. This results in theft, corruption and disappearance of food caused by those who are providing the food. To drive home the point of intransigent problems, it is important to cite research from two decades ago: Shaw (2001) reported that despite policy implementation, the Department of Education focused more on keeping records of accounts than on the benefits of the school feeding programme; and Del Rosso (1999) maintained that when monitoring and evaluation was done properly, it ensured food security and learners were given the required quantity and quality of food. The overall problem, as Devereux (2018) argues, is that the national feeding scheme's objectives are vague. Many problems persist, with much still unknown in terms of monitoring and evaluation, and with the need for more research on their design and delivery in different countries. The outstanding issues relate to the following: a need for country comparative policy research to assess aspects of food safety and modes of food procurement; the nutritional value of the foods supplied; nutrition education and its effect, if any, on knowledge and behaviour; and finally, how feeding schemes impact on livelihoods, for example in terms of farmers' incomes and job creation for food handlers. In this sense, the implementation of the aims of the National Nutrition Programme as specified in the national policy has still not been achieved.

The World Bank (2009) has consistently pronounced that school feeding programmes have substantial benefits for both the social protection and the education of children from impoverished families. For instance,

a subsequent World Bank report (Wadhwa, 2019) found that school feeding schemes resulted in nutritional improvement in low- to middle-income countries, and boosted enrolment and attendance rates. There are 9 million free school meals per day in South Africa, with the Cape Verde seeing half a million children benefitting, and Ghana has 1.5 million students benefitting. Avenues to support home grown meals can be seen in how many African countries use NEPAD support (2023), with some already using digital technologies for mobile money and other digital platforms to facilitate cash transfers as in Kenya and Nigeria as they seek to improve financial management and transparency.

Mostert's (2021) quantitative study finds a significant effect of school feeding schemes on the education and health outcomes of South African children. It shows improvement in the health of children who are ill, as well as higher school attendance rates and better academic achievement. The impact is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and greater for boys than for girls. There are also positive spill over effects, such as the parents of children benefitting from such feeding schemes, spending less on food than non-beneficiary parents. The conclusion is that such feeding programmes support the South African population beyond the targeted children's education and health outcomes. Such schemes are however more effective in attracting children into school than keeping them there. They are social nets and not educational interventions, which means complementary programmes need to be added to feeding schemes, such as those promoting homegrown food (Chhetri et al., 2024; Powell, 2006; Langinger, 2011), or diversity as offered by the World Food Programme in Cameroon (WFP, 2009), or even information on how feeding programmes encourage local food production in a sustainable way (Verguet, Linasalle, Chakrabarti, Husain, Burbano and Bundy, 2020). Others (Chibuke, Ossai, Akamika, Onyemaechi, Edwin, Eweni and Azuogo, 2023) report that recipients complain of poor-quality food, in a Nigerian feeding scheme. The data reflects a dual history of feeding schemes at best. With this said, a methodological section follows here below, after which we present a conceptual framework for this paper.

Methodology

The study area is Lokaleng Primary School that falls under the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality. The school is located in Lokaleng village on the outskirts of Mmabatho, its erstwhile capital that is now a suburb in the older Mahikeng town. The latter is now the capital city of North West Province, and located close to South Africa's border to Botswana. The unemployment rate is a staggering 53% (Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2021). Lokaleng Primary School is deemed appropriate to investigate a school feeding scheme, being in the quintile category of poorer schools. It enables the researcher to assess the effectiveness of the Nutrition Programme in an area where it is needed. The map hereunder outlines its location.



Source: https://www.google.co.za/maps/@25.7975234,25.5872145,14z?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI0MDgyMS4wIwKXMDSoASA-FQAw%3D%3D



The study assessed the School Feeding Scheme Programme by means of a qualitative case study, with in-depth exploration of a single phenomenon in its natural setting (Priya, 2021:95). Purposive sampling was used to select key informants, that is, food handlers and teachers selected for their involvement in the SFSP. South Africa's Nutrition Policy Guidelines (2010) state that teachers are the administrators of the SFSP. Purposive sampling identified and selected proficient and well-informed individuals on the topic at hand. Following Cresswell's (2014) view that a qualitative sample should be between five and 25 individuals, the target population was comprised of five teachers, five food handlers, and five parents. The sample size afforded a new and richly textured understanding of the case, with case-oriented data analysis. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing the interviewer to obtain in-depth information regarding participants' experiences and to discover any additional information valuable to the study. The study used thematic analyses in which similar data were reviewed and grouped together to reveal emerging themes. While the study inductively focussed on Lokaleng's feeding scheme, it also drew from the literature of other cases, and cited provincial statistics to gain an overall understanding of the provincial picture in terms of food security. The paper combines analysis from the school feeding scheme and from the provincial statistics in terms of household and nutrition security in the local area (Ngaka Modiri Molema district). Ethical guidelines were followed to conduct the study, through institutional permissions (NWU, DoE). Permission from participants was obtained to conduct interviews, and interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of their opinions, and of their choice to withdraw from the research at any time.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this paper is four-pronged, framed by the overarching objective as set out earlier in this paper: to determine the benefits and challenges of school feeding schemes. First, the paper adheres to the United Nations General Assembly's Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), affirming children's rights to protection, education, health care, shelter and nutrition.

Second, while the paper examines a particular case study (Lokaleng Primary School), it argues that working models of such schemes need to be developed for different regions, based on local circumstances such as poverty levels and economic hardship. Thus, while it may be ideal to provide locally produced food for such schemes, this is not always possible, as there might not be (sufficient) suppliers or even a centralized market for such supplies in the local area. Lokaleng Primary School serves as a sample of a feeding scheme, to extract lessons from it about what is possible in such circumstances.

Third, while national SFSP's exist in South Africa, with government policies to monitor and evaluate them, they face unabating challenges, particularly in the area of policy implementation. This means the contribution of such schemes to the overall academic and holistic development of the child remains somewhat unreachable for most of the recipients of the SFSP, particularly when there is no overall assessment of the schemes' impact on school children's academic performance, class attendance, and more longer terms goals. While there is most likely a positive healthier and more nutritious environment created by the SFSP's, the literature reflects, at best, mixed results on the broader outcomes of such schemes in terms of better academic performance, greater attendance, and more effective learning systems and results thereof.

The fourth aspect links this weakness to the issue of using local and/or regional models to deal with SFSs. It means that a greater effort needs to be made to involve multiple constituencies in school feeding schemes, so as to construct decentralized models of their operational and more long-term policy aims relating to better attendance, improved academic performance, and the impact of such schemes for poor households. It also means more quality education, more infrastructure where these are necessary, and more support or assessment and upgrading of unqualified teachers.

Results and findings

The study aimed to identify the benefits, challenges, and sustainability of the school feeding programmes at Lokaleng Primary School.

Benefits of the School Feeding Scheme Programme

To understand the impact of the school feeding scheme programme on learners (as referred to by participants and the Education Department), participants were asked how the scheme was beneficial to them. Some cited poverty reduction as a benefit. Teacher (i) stated the following:

The school feeding scheme...(sees to it that)...learners attend school regularly and...hunger has decreased. Learners are able to concentrate for a long time...Learners...sometimes sleep without eating. So...they know that they will be having breakfast...and they will not go back home with an empty stomach.

Food handler (1) affirmed that:

Children...from homes...(with no)...income...(can)...get food...in school and go home with a full stomach.They...listen in class and participate in activities...Children seem happier and healthier since the feeding scheme...because of the healthy food we cook for them.They are even able to improve academically

Parent (A) stated that:

The majority of...learners come from disadvantaged families...and attend school because they know that they will receive food.

From the above quotes by a teacher, parent and food handler, attendance is reportedly improved, with positive impacts on academic learning or preparation, and children who are physically satiated and therefore able to concentrate on school tasks. It seems that there is improved school attendance thanks to the feeding scheme at the school where a majority come from disadvantaged background, even though the literature is ambivalent on such issues. Mostert (2021) has found a positive impact on South African school children's health, school attendance and academic achievements. This is supported by Verguet, Limasalle, Chakrabarti, Husain, Burbano, Drake and Bundy (2020) in a study on such schemes in low- to middle-income countries. On the other hand, Tomlinson's (2007) study of South Africa and Malawi found such schemes controversial, and pointed to the methodological problems of studies purporting a link between hunger and academic performance. Tomlinson cites the World Bank's statement that there is little evidence to show the impact of such schemes on children's nutritional status, and that such schemes may keep children in school, particularly girls, but they have no impact on the root causes of malnutrition and hunger. Yet, as Food handler (1) explained in the quote above, children from homes with no income go home with a full stomach, they listen and participate in class activities, and improve academically and seem healthier. Such a view supports those that see more healthy food and adequate food provision producing a healthier child and better academic results, and that such a school context does alleviate situations of dire deprivation at home.

Monitoring of the school feeding scheme programme.

Monitoring and evaluating feeding programmes are important to ensure that they are operating as planned and for sustainability. Participants were asked how the programme was monitored and who was responsible to ensure that it was functioning. Teacher (ii) stated the following:

I...(supervise)...the programme...(to)...ensure that the food is available for the learners and that they eat on time, while ensuring that they get a balanced diet.

Food handler (2) remarked:

A supervisor...(teacher)...checks every morning how we prepare the food and...(a)...supervisor from the Department of Education comes...maybe once a term.



The Principal affirmed the following:

One teacher...is the main programme facilitator, ensures food is enough for learners and reports in order for me as the school principal.

Food availability, balanced diets, and the monitoring of these by two persons is done either regularly (teacher) or irregularly (DoE representative), according to reports by the sample of three constituencies interviewed, that is, teachers, parents and food handlers. One teacher who monitors and evaluates the programme pointed to the importance of programme sustainability, which is an important aspect discussed further on in this section. The same sample of constituencies also indicates a low level of monitoring by the DoE. Some participants reported that the relevant DoE supervisors appeared only quarterly.

In terms of monitoring and evaluation of the feeding scheme, teachers verify a functional system, with statements suggesting 'regular inspections of adherence to hygiene standards, of food provision, and of the quality of the programme.' Yet the language of research participants remains conditional, with qualifying phrases such as 'from my understanding', or statements that administrators (teacher/s) 'might review' meal quality, which suggest that the monitoring and evaluation have a more loosely structured framework than is needed. Whatever documentation emerges from the programme seems to remain in DoE offices, and DoE visits are infrequent.

Furthermore, Teacher (iii) (cum-administrator) of the feeding scheme reported the following:

I oversee...implementation...with the principal and food handlers to ensure...meals are provided efficiently and... meet...(learners)...nutritional needs...I...monitor the impact of the programme on the learner's health, attendance and academic performance, providing feedback to improve the programme, as needed.

While the above statement points to monitoring and evaluation and is in tandem with the views of the food handler cited earlier, there is no further corroboration of such statements. This is in relation to systems efficiency, food quality or nutrition, and even the long-term impact of the food scheme, school attendance and academic performance. While participants agree on the food scheme's positive impact, these statements do not suggest any long-term effect or impact. Moreover, no mention is made of nutrition experts regularly checking nutritional value, its diverse offerings, and the long-term impact of the school feeding scheme. The following gives credence to such an argument. Parent B stated the following:

There are inconsistencies in...quality and variety of meals...Children expressed dissatisfaction with the taste and nutritional value of the food, which is concerning

The above was corroborated by Parent (C), who expressed it in the following way:

My child...complained about...inadequate...(meal) portions...leaving him...hungry and dissatisfied with the overall meal experience. I...noticed...a limited variety of food options provided which may lead to monotony and decreased interest in meals.

One major difficulty of food programmes is the internal monitoring and evaluation process, at times due to lack of skills and capacity. Only two teachers are assigned to the Lokaleng programme, which includes writing reports and sustaining the programme, but the multiple tasks may become overwhelming and consequently compromise aspects of the programme. The use of available human resources is another aspect that could be enhanced if multiple constituencies were involved, as discussed in the next section. The Department of Education (DoE, 2009) stipulates that district offices should monitor actual implementation of school nutrition programmes by making regular visits to schools where monitoring and evaluation checklists are completed. The DBE (2011-2012) specifies that schools need daily visits, with phone calls to every other school in the district to monitor the state of the feeding scheme. However, as mentioned above, stakeholder perceptions indicate that DBE visits are once a quarter only. The DBE (2023) guidelines for evaluation and monitoring of such programmes include the following:

1. To develop and monitor the implementation of a framework on the national school nutrition programme;
2. To contribute to enhanced learning capacity through school feeding programmes;
3. To promote and support food production and improve food security in school communities;
4. communities;
5. To strengthen nutrition education in schools and communities;
6. To monitor compliance with the DBE and treasury regulations.

These goals are noble in their intentions, but as a conglomerate of aims, they are far from being achieved, as the case of the Lokaleng feeding programme shows. Much more is needed in this regard to achieve the six points above. This does not mean that what has been achieved at Lokaleng so far is not meaningful, useful or to the advantage of school learners. Rather, it is a question of the system of food provision, of stakeholder engagement, and of building on what is available in the context of particular settings in schools, communities and regions where school feeding programmes are run. It is also about the use of human and other resources that are available and can be used in the feeding programmes. These points are elaborated on in the discussion section that follows hereunder. For now, it is worth identifying the particular issues related to stakeholder involvement at Lokaleng, to then go on to discuss its ramifications and possible solutions to its challenges, not just at Lokaleng but at institutions and communities that are involved in such programmes or are impacted by them.

Involvement in the feeding scheme programme

Since the Nutrition Programme Guidelines suggests community partners in school efforts, this study sought to understand their role in the SFSP. The following responses emerged:

Parent (D) stated the following on the non-involvement of parents in feeding schemes:

There is no involvement because the principal does not let us parents get involved in anything that has to do with the feeding scheme.

Such a view, of low stakeholder participation, is corroborated by Food handler 2:

My involvement is to cook and dish out for the children. I am not involved in any decision making such as to how the menu should be.

Parent (E)'s views are in tandem with such a view:

I am part of the SGB... (with)... a grandchild in this school. However, I would not say I am involved in any way because I just come when we have a meeting where we are shown reports of the feeding scheme.

The above makes it clear that cross constituency collaboration is low in the scheme, with neither food handlers nor (SGB) parents being involved. This is also the case of parents not ostensibly being allowed to get involved, which is highly irregular in relation to the DBE guidelines cited above. One parent's misgivings of 'being ungrateful' reflects poorly, both on the programme's operations and on how poor parents may be further disenfranchised in terms of their status of being poor and on the receiving end of 'charity', instead of being based on the UN principle of the rights of such children.

Challenges faced by the Lokaleng School Feeding Scheme Programme

School feeding scheme programmes have issues worldwide. Wang and Fawzi (2020) cite good practices in this respect in LMICs, but also challenges and shortcomings, as studies on the topic show. Intermittent or late delivery of food was identified as a challenge in the Western Cape (Manje and Jita, 2019). One objective of our study was to identify such challenges. In the case of Lokaleng Primary, Parent (D) thus affirmed the following:

Food supply is one of the biggest problems... the school is facing. Sometimes children do not receive food for 4 or 5 days because the principal says the Department of Education has not paid yet... the school has not received funds to purchase food.



The school principal corroborated the parents' view with the following statement:

As...principal of the school, I...receive a cheque from the (Education) Department to...(buy)...the groceries needed but sometimes a late deposit by the Department is made therefore there will be a delay in purchasing the food.

Such late payments reflect further inconsistencies in the system. Some participants raised the issue of food expiration and allergies. Parent (E) stated the following:

Some...(purchased)...food...is expired [outdated]...the school should consider changing or substituting some meals with others, due to learners being allergic to certain foods.

Outdated food can raise suspicions of malpractice, and while some of the challenges faced may be structural (how to disburse funds or food, how to use limited infrastructure or capacity), others are more basic and can be avoided. As for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) conditions, Lokaleng School seems to comply. It is not clear however if all schools in the province are compliant with what the World Health Organization (WHO) states is relevant when children are under the level of optimal sanitation conditions, including ablution conditions (soap, towels, clean toilets). Moreover, the Human Science Research Council reports (SABC news, 20-8-2024), contrary to widely held views, that South Africa is not food secure, which compounds the problem of food and health conditions.

Discussion

Five critical aspects of school feeding schemes are discernible and need to be discussed. The first is the discourse on rights of various kinds; second, the necessity of involving multiple constituencies and aspects in such schemes; third, macro concerns around food, health and the environment; fourth, the need for more research on the agri-business industry; and fifth, the construction or adaptation of models of administration, operationalisation, and systems of implementation. There are models of implementation in the literature, as outlined by Droomer, Cooper-Bell, Linderbloom, Scholtz and Besata (2023), setting out various aspects of implementation, voucher systems, and direct transfers that would also be useful for schools. In this section, the five aspects discussed are used as lynchpins for a more relevant, expressive and cohesive form of thinking of such food schemes, and which may then be applied as guidelines to Lokaleng School and other schools in such contexts.

Food provision as a human right

The United Nations Charter (nd) and that of the World Health Organization (nd) both assert numerous children's rights. The former cites over 40 such rights, including the provision of food. African children's rights are particularly important in the 21st century. Globally, the continent has the youngest demographic age: 70% of sub-Saharan Africa is under-30 years old, and 42% is under 15 years of age. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (2006) includes health rights, and the UN Charter asserts the right to life survival (right to life and for development in the best possible way), free primary education, family guidance and togetherness. Such rights redefine children as socio-legal entities, particularly in vulnerable societies. The aim of such assertions is to counter the phenomenon of child dependency translating into oppression and abuse of children. Similarly, parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds should not be excluded from decision making in the operations of feedings schemes. To contextualise such assertions, Table A hereunder reflects the dire circumstances of households and children in North West Province.

Table A (below) serves a useful heuristic function, to reflect on the relevance of rights in context. Lokaleng is situated in Ngaka Modiri Molema district (2nd last row in Table A above), where food security sits at a paltry 28% and severe food insecurity at an alarming 26%. Severe and moderate household hunger adds up to over 30%, and at-risk food consumption is at 60% if the borderline (38%) and poor (22%) scores are added up. In light of UN assertions of children's rights, which are country to country agreements on such rights, these figures are unacceptable by South Africa's own agreements as a participating country at the UN.

Table A: North West Food and Nutrition Security situation based on selected indicators

DISTRICTS	FOOD SECURITY INDICATORS (%)											
	Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS)			Household Hunger Scale (HHS)			Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS)			Food Consumption Score (FCS)		
	Food Secure	Mild/Moderate	Severe	Little/No	Moderate	Severe	Highest	Medium	Lowest	Acceptable	Borderline	Poor
Bojanala	27.0	50.0	22.0	74.0	17.0	10.0	82.0	13.0	5.0	48.0	33.0	19.0
Dr Kenneth Kaunda	20.0	46.0	34.0	59.0	28.0	13.0	67.0	22.0	10.0	51.0	26.0	22.0
Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompoti	22.0	50.0	29.0	64.0	25.0	10.0	77.0	18.0	5.0	37.0	36.0	27.0
Ngaka Modiri Molema	28.0	46.0	26.0	69.0	23.0	8.0	73.0	21.0	6.0	40.0	38.0	22.0
Province	25.5	56.0	25.9	69.9	21.2	9.8	76.8	17.1	6.1	44.8	33.9	21.3

Source: North West Provincial Report: Food and Nutrition Security (2023: 16)

The following statement by Teacher (iv) outlines the situation at Lokaleng Primary:

The...programme...provides...(the learner with)...equality...(as all)...receive the same meal regardless of...background...(It)...can help reduce the stigma...(of)... poverty and food insecurity...(It)...encourages school attendance as children are motivated to come to school knowing they will receive a meal.

This is all true, but one has to remember that the local situation of problems also reflects a wider problem in the province. Interventions are therefore necessary if the aim is to shift from Table A’s provincial figures of 55.2% risky food situation (adding 33.9% borderline and 21.3% poor food consumption score) to a more positive one. Thus, while there are weaknesses and strengths to Lokaleng’s administration of its food distribution, there remains much to be done in terms of the wider social nexus of interventions. Parent (E) commented:

The...feeding programme...(is crucial as)...it relieves some...financial burdens of families...(as a)...majority...learners come from poor households. As an unemployed parent...I don’t have money to buy food for my child’s lunch box.

The necessity of involving multiple constituencies

In addition to using UN and WHO guidelines, it is crucial that multiple civic, government and private sector constituencies be involved in such feedings schemes. It is also vitally important that parents, through their involvement in the feeding schemes or school structures, be included in the decision-making process. Parent (E) echoed feelings of being marginal to the feeding scheme, reported by another parent quoted above:

I have never been involved nor heard anything in parent’s meetings...(about)...the school feeding scheme. I do not think we even have a say because it seems as if they are doing us a favour so we may seem ungrateful if we were to speak on it.

This exclusion of parents from such schemes is one glaring weakness of food disbursements. Parents’ inclusion can imply a number of things, from assisting in the programme, to keeping close to it, or receiving alleviating support if part-time or voluntary work is not available in the programme. As mentioned earlier, NEPAD supports such programmes, which means that pathways out of funding problems are possible. This calls for multiple forms of partnerships, when these are possible, so that the effort is more collective and does not isolate parents or exclude them from the programme. Some authors (Bryant, Burton, O’Kane, Woodside,



Ahem, Garnett, Spence, Sharif, Rutter, Baker and Evans, 2023) even suggest children's and adult workshops, which makes sense as such a shift would fulfil various needs: to train parents and children, to include them in the decision making, to gain their input and participation directly, to knit the social fabric of the school with its multiple constituencies, and to connect the programme to those whose interests are purportedly being served. Structures such as the existing Parent-Teacher Associations can be used, or in the case of Lokaleng, a parent association can be formed to empower parents to partake in school affairs if they can find the time to do so.

This particular aspect of involving multiple constituencies is also emphasized by the United Nations and the African Union (FAO, UN, 2022), and by the related literature (Munje and Jita, 2019; UNESCO, 2004). The former cite training that is needed on collaboration and professionalism, while the latter cite consensus building on policy and objectives. Thus, the issue of meal ration shortfalls can also be dealt with through such multi-constituency involvement. Moreover, more precision on the nutritional value of food provided is surely needed, with capacity provision in this regard, to monitor food systems more closely and implement interventions where required.

Sub-Saharan Africa has limited government capacity, particularly for youth, which makes development prospects low. Support for such programmes as feeding schemes and the development of multiple partnerships is therefore crucial. FAO assertions, directed at Ivory Coast's implementation of agri-food systems concerning youth, are relevant here. In particular, the FAO stresses sustainability and capacity development with multiple UN agencies and workshops, and the need for gender equality, as well as for sustainability in the economic, environmental and technological fields. There are various civic efforts at food production that are not supported, aimed at weaving a front of home-grown food production. Three such efforts were cursorily identified: a PhD student producing vegetables on a small scale; a micro-producing entrepreneur of fresh vegetables; and a government programme supporting families ravaged by apartheid, fostering diverse small-crop development.

Shifting macro-parameters of food regimes

As suggesting a wider set of participative constituencies may raise other issues, including around corporates and narrow vested interests, any model would need to carefully discern such interests and stakeholders. It would also require some focus on inter-departmental co-operation in government, that could contribute to implementing feeding schemes and broadening their scope to related aspects that improve the conditions of poor households. In the case of Mahikeng, where Lokaleng is located, there are no local fresh food markets to supply consumers or schools. As a result, corporates are in charge of supply, or small food handlers purchase from corporates to supply schools. There is a broad need to revisit the chain of the fresh food system (and the whole industrial chain), bearing in mind how diverse nutrition is guaranteed or even why school curricula need to include aspects of food and school gardens, if these are not already included therein. Some interview participants (teacher-administrator and food handler, cited earlier) mention healthy diet food, simply as broad cursory statements relating to general nutritional value. There is no corroboration of its nutritious diversity. What also needs to be discerned are the corporate structures that the food system passes through, including genetically modified (GM) foods. Food risks in South Africa are not immune from the dangers of industrial chains: the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) cites two basic foods being problematic, in the quest for wholesome food: one is a staple food (maize) and the other is traditionally considered very healthy to consume (soya):

Soybean and maize are commercialised in South Africa... Soybean... (is)... 95% GM, and maize... (more)... than 85% GM (SANBI, 2023).

Deepening efforts for more nutrient food value and for alternative foods

In addition to such macro issues, lack of diversity and portion sizes in food provision under the said school

programme remain problematic, as one parent decried. Mahugu's (2021) study on nutrition in Kwa-Zulu-Natal cites challenges of food preferences, culture, late payment to service providers, and lack of training for relevant stakeholders. Onyenweaku and Kesa (2023) found that feeding schemes have positive impacts on numerous conditions relating to poverty (such as unemployment and dependency). Yet they also found some with flavourless food across four provinces in South Africa (including North West). While capacity and funding may be a problem at the school or with public administrators not taking their role seriously or unable to do so, the situation also depends on other higher up structures needing to be in place to maintain, monitor and sustain a high-quality food regime. As indicated herein earlier, systems are not always fully functional and require necessary interventions by public bodies, whether government or civic. The role of relevant actors is crucial, as indicated by other authors in another context (Chhetri, Ghimire, Aryal, Dura, Lamichhane and Chhetri, 2023), showing how a home-grown model with locally produced food involving cooperatives and farmers can work, and with significant parental involvement in the programme. It is also possible for parents, if not for school children, to get involved in home and school gardens.

More research is also needed on South Africa's role and participation in the global food industrial chain and on the consequences of such linkages, to determine strategic models for provinces, local areas or regions. While government does disburse funds for diverse forms of social protection, the lack of food and employment, along with issues pertaining to quality schooling, are a trifactor of toxic conditions that needs further study and intervention, especially in rural areas where there is little or no industrial growth. There is also little in the way of alternative forms of food that can make up basic food baskets. What alternatives there are, such as indigenous foods, ethnic varieties and foods from the region and off the continent, all remain part of the general market structures. This is particularly so in rural areas with weaker civic structures and where there is less pressure on government to build on these alternatives, leaving the order of the market intact, to the detriment of the poor and vulnerable. This impacts most on poor families, and particularly families such as those in Lokaleng. This study took Lokaleng as a case, but the village, school and wider context need consideration, including its neighbourly proximity to North West University, a national institution that needs to have a greater involvement in the school, village or its community. It is also worth noting that Lokaleng saw service delivery protests in 2021, related to food parcel deliveries during the COVID-19 period (Rammutla in 'Maftownian Online', 2021).

Appropriating school feeding models as the context determines

Finally, while this paper has made suggestions relating to feeding schemes, there is also a need to work on determining what the most appropriate model is in particular contexts. Such a model can only be worked out by multiple-constituency input and a shift of the changes in the micro- and macro-environment, which is also contingent on political will from the provincial government. It means inter-Departmental work, between for instance the Departments of Education, Social Development, Health and Agriculture, as well as other Departments involved in poverty and entrepreneurial activities, to offer multi-Department funds and the many-sided views to resolving problems. This paper pointed to some underlying problems that need addressing, and to a more decisive framework to redress feeding scheme shortcomings. Furthermore, there is the private sector that could be of use with funds and projects, and support by NEPAD for SFSP's.

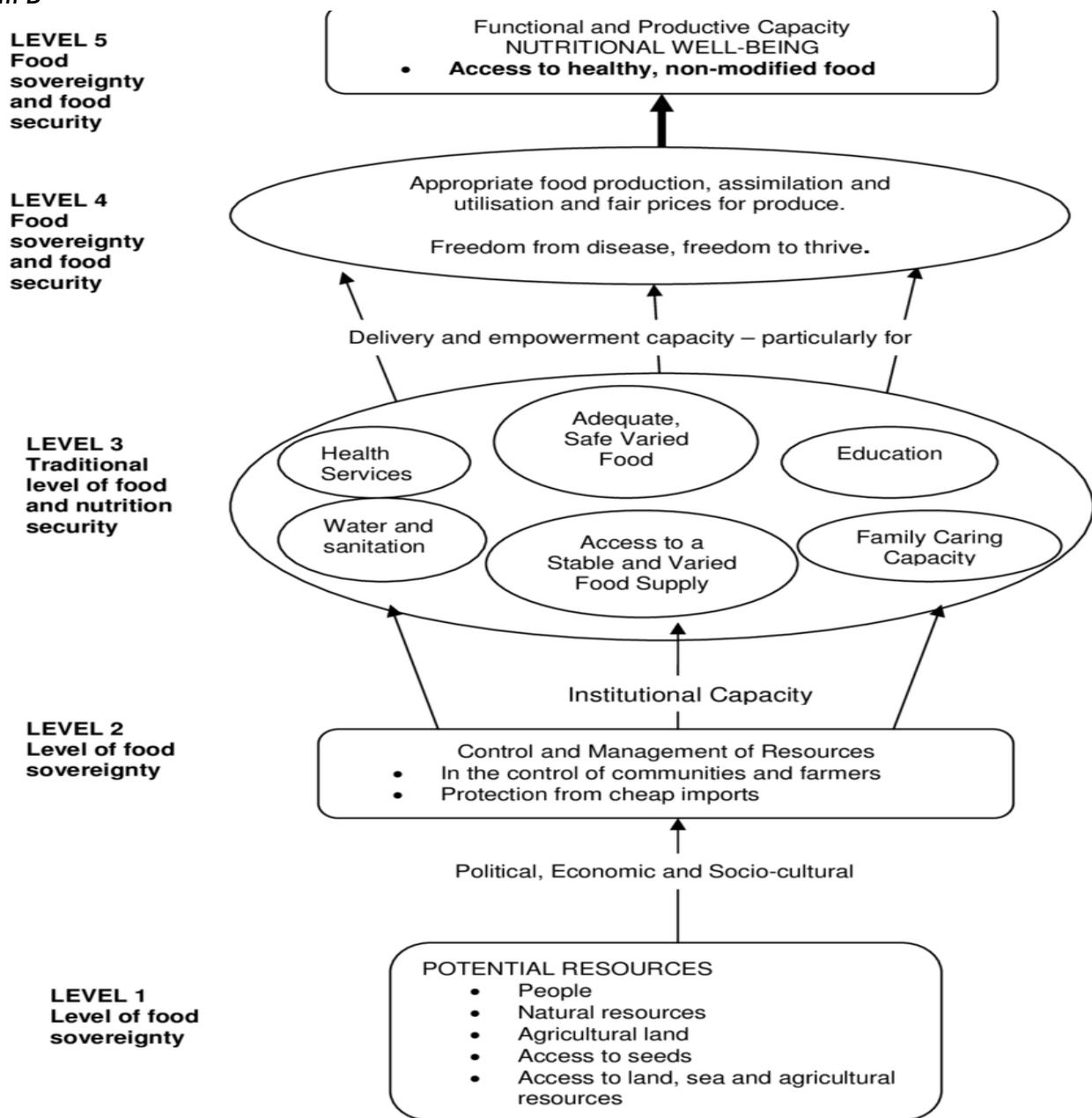
While the kinds of possible models are diverse and context dependent, an outline of a model serving to develop working models will be based on the circumstances, the region, and the social, economic and other forces at play. A summary of a framework suggested by Tomlinson (2015) would be useful to develop variations in the different school districts and regions.

Tomlinson (2015) argues that feeding schemes in South Africa have huge differences regarding food providers (multiple or single), households suffering food insecurity, and poorer provinces feeding pupils intermittently while the richer provinces feed them five days a week. Tomlinson (2015) also cites private Grade R (pre-primary school) levels that are neglected, particularly in rural or poor urban areas. South African feeding



schemes are complicated and expensive, have a low coverage, are inconsistent, and are not nutritionally comprehensive. Most have implementation problems that stem from management difficulties. He also points to feeding programmes seeing a steady drop in pupil numbers since programme inception (1994).

Diagram B



Source: Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Food-sovereignty-and-school-feeding_fig1_252649665/download?tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6Il9kaXJY3QifX0. Retrieved on 16 August 2024.

There are moreover vast differences: for instance, 20 pupils being fed in one school, and 1000 in another. Tomlinson therefore suggests a more refined targeting of schools to run the programme, an improved management system, and guidelines that set a minimum quantity of micro-nutrients in diets, and that discourage use of fortified commercial foods. This speaks to the point raised earlier, of the need to develop local food networks and to begin to cut the dependency on corporate supply of foods.

Conclusion and recommendations

While this paper began as an empirical study of Lokaleng School's feeding scheme, it did not limit its arguments to that case, due to the overarching contexts, provincial and local socio-economic conditions, markets (or lack of their presence in civil society), and the institutional surroundings of the school. While Lokaleng's SFSP is delivering food, albeit with some administrative hiccups, the case provides a general point of departure to argue for more refined policy practice to support such schemes. This paper has used the Lokaleng Feeding Scheme to argue the more general point that macro-social structures are also necessary to change: for more intensive multi-constituency participation; for the deepening of a human rights culture in the food regime provided at schools; for more capacitation at local levels to function optimally in tackling the complex problems of poverty and its effects; for providing quality education to the relevant quintile schools; and for sustainable development of those that have been economically disenfranchised, after 30 years of political liberation. This means that such schools also need to be encased within provincial operational and implementation plans for turning their food programmes around and ensuring a more effective, efficient and sustainable effort at one of the most vulnerable constituencies (youth) that is important for the future of the country. There is also the alternative support for feeding schemes and alternative food regimes (indigenous food) that can be fostered with some role for schools, parents or the community concerned. It goes without saying that policy and implementation would need to be enhanced by such efforts and that the aim would be long term, both for schools and for their communities.



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