


Reinventing The Leverage Of Social Investment Via Social Assistance: National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP) And Financial Capacity Building In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Over the last three decades, globalization, demographic shifts, and technology advancements have led to strained labor markets and increased inequality in high- and upper-middle-income nations worldwide. In order to balance the competing demands of promoting economic innovation and growth and enhancing population welfare, governments have responded to these challenges with a broad range of measures. The concept and practice of social investment gained importance in the repertoire of policy solutions in this situation. Social investment aims to advance the social inclusion of marginalized people and groups, primarily via long-term human capital development and labor market participation. The study aims to assess the impact of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP), as a social investment program, on financial capacity building in Nigeria. The Endogenous Growth Theory was used as the theoretical basis of the study. The study used a mixed methodology comprising of both survey and documentary research designs. Findings of the study established that the NHGSFP has not significantly impacted on the financial capacity of targeted groups like farmers, food vendors and distributors in the value chain, due to factors such as poor multisectoral collaboration, lethargic political commitment, low investment, absence of a holistic approach in implementation, and insufficient Monitoring and Evaluation. The study recommended a comprehensive policy review of the program and the implementation of a balanced multistakeholder approach, as strategies to restructure the program for improved functionality and enhanced financial capacity building.

Keywords: Financial capacity, Social assistance, Social inclusion, Social investment, Welfare policy.

1. Introduction

Neoliberal market-based policy reforms were embraced by the majority of industrialized and developing nations in the 1980s and 1990s in response to the global economic crises as well as criticisms of the post-World War II Keynesian redistributive welfare state from conservatives. Neoliberal reforms were successful in transforming public services in developing nations in Asia and Latin America by means of spending reductions, welfare state contractions, and privatization of public services. Moreover, neoliberal reforms were often a condition for receiving financial support or rescue from global institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Peng, 2011a)

Although these changes were successful in addressing certain government budgetary issues, they also brought forth new societal issues. They led to a rise in poverty, social and economic inequality, and

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human insecurity in numerous countries. The emergence of the social investment perspective in the late 1990s was a response to the global policy framework that dominated public policy thinking after the 1970s, specifically the neoliberal framework (Jenson & St-Martin, 2003; Jenson, 2010; Midgley, 1995, 1999; Midgley & Tang, 2001; Peng, 2011a; 2011b; Perkins, Nelms & Symth, 2004). The "social investment state" surfaced as an elaborate and systematic welfare plan in the late 1990s, focused on investing in people's potential throughout their lives in an effort to balance social and economic objectives in developed capitalist democracies.

Giddens (1998) argued that the social investment state should be viewed as the "Third Way" between post-war welfare state and neo-liberalism. According to him, it is the hallmark of a forward-thinking strategy that distinguishes a state entrepreneur. Positive wellbeing is what is meant by expenditure, which takes the shape of investments in human capital. He hoped that this would produce a populace of "responsible risk takers". Giddens (cited in Perkins et al., 2004) described lifelong learning and a larger role for the government in the social economy as the two main social investment techniques. Nevertheless, he identified other relevant points that haven't been covered as thoroughly in the later works which included entrepreneurship, mobility of accomplishments and rights, and public-private partnerships.

Midgley (1999) was another early proponent of the idea, suggesting that the productivist component of the New Deal and Keynes-Beveridge era is where the idea of social investment originates. He asserted that the emergence of a post-war redistributive social welfare platform linked to Titmuss, which redesigned the now-maligned post-war welfare state form, replaced this component. Most literature on social investment acknowledge that the model was created in response to a drastically altered social and economic structure. This is commonly understood in terms of the difficulties that come with trying to compete in the globalized knowledge economy, where success depends on having a highly skilled, educated, and adaptable workforce with welfare policies that promote active participation (mainly in the labor market) and prepare people to take on new risks. It is also understood that structural changes in society, such as an aging population, shifting work and family patterns, and a more culturally diverse society, must be addressed (Perkins et al., 2004).

Three main concepts are generally included in the social investment perspective: economic and social policies should be reintegrated; the state should transition from one of redistribution to facilitation; and economic activation should be achieved through investments in human capital. By recognizing the limitations of free-market solutions and making an effort to reintegrate social and economic policies, the social investment perspective seeks to address the shortcomings of the neoliberal policy approach of the 1980s and early 1990s. The social investment perspective reasserts the significance of public policy in correcting market failures and in achieving positive economic returns at the same time by combining social policy agenda items, such as investments in children, families, education, and health, with

economic policy concerns, such as shifting industrial structures, global economic competition, and job and wealth creation (Peng, 2011a).

The "social investment state" can preserve the social and economic well-being of communities and society by making investments in human capital. This is quite distinct from the role of traditional welfare states that focussed primarily on the provision of social programs and services, frequently with an emphasis on universal access, in order to foster social cohesion, lessen inequality, and guarantee a basic standard of life for all residents. According to Giddens (1998), social investment in the UK under the New Labour government was seen as going beyond the old "passive" welfare state that was centered on maintaining income in order to create economic chances and prospects through targeted investment in human capital. In addition to nations in the English-speaking world, East Asian nations like Japan and South Korea have embraced the New Labour's conceptual framework for social investment (Peng, 2011a). This paper focusses on how social investment is implemented via social assistance, i.e. National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP), to enhance financial capacity building in Nigeria. The contribution(s) of the NHGSFP in financial capacity building, in terms of financial empowerment of key stakeholders, will be examined.

2. Objectives of the study

The study aims to assess the impact of NHGSFP on financial capacity building in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the policy objectives of the NHGSFP and its potentiality for financial capacity building in Nigeria.
2. Assess the implementation of the NHGSFP in Nigeria and its performance in enhancing financial capacity building in Nigeria.
3. Suggest strategies for improving the functionality of the NHGSFP to foster financial capacity building in Nigeria.

3. Conceptual review

3.1 Social investment

Social investment policies are those that work to lower future risks of income loss and poverty for people while also preparing, mobilizing, and equipping them with the tools they need to support themselves in the knowledge economy (especially through employment). The social investment viewpoint, which emphasizes spending on human capacity development, has consistently highlighted the need to invest in, mobilize, and restore human capital and competencies over the whole life course in order to manage social risks (Bonoli, 2005; Esping-Andersen, 1999, 2002; Hemerijck, 2013; Morel et al., 2012). The fundamental concept is "prepare rather than repair," which means giving people the knowledge and

abilities they need to manage potential risks throughout their lives rather than just making up for their occurrence at a later period. Thus, using social investment as a policy option entails taking proactive measures to mitigate social risks and end the generational transfer of poverty and disadvantage (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Hausermann, Garritzmann & Palier, 2022; Jenson, 2010).

3.2 Social assistance

As a component of the social protection strategy, social assistance comprises interventions that offer support to the poor who would not otherwise be eligible for benefits under the formal, established social protection systems, like social insurance and pensions. Traditionally, social assistance has been used to improve social welfare by means of focused interventions on poverty reduction that assist the poor in overcoming risks during times of crisis. Giving extremely vulnerable people direct, focused assistance helps them handle the risk of shocks caused by natural disasters, armed conflicts, and economic downturns. Cash or income transfers; in-kind transfers and other food-based programs; child allowances; housing, fuel, or cash subsidies; and emergency employment schemes are among the most well-known types of social assistance programs (Handayani & Burkley, 2010).

3.3 School Feeding Programs (SFP)

School feeding programs, also known as school meal programs, are initiatives that supply children and teenagers enrolled in schools with wholesome food on a regular basis (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2019). According to studies by Adelman et al. (2008), Aliyar et al. (2015), Bundy et al. (2009), Drake et al. (2017), Wang & Fawzi (2020), and the World Food Program [WFP] (2013a), school feeding benefits children and adolescents by reducing hunger, reducing micronutrient deficiency and anemia, preventing overweight and obesity, improving school enrolment and attendance, and increasing cognitive and academic performance. School feeding programs are implemented in most countries, albeit to varying degrees and in different ways (Drake et al., 2017; WFP, 2013a). While school feeding programs are common in high-income nations, they are typically not fully implemented in low- and middle-income nations (LMICs), which are those with the highest levels of poverty and hunger. Rather than being widely accessible, school feeding interventions in the majority of sub-Saharan African nations are primarily focused on areas with the highest levels of food insecurity (Bundy et al., 2009; Wang & Fawzi, 2020).

3.4 Financial capacity building

Financial capacity building is an essential daily activity that includes developing the skills necessary for an individual to independently manage their finances in a way that aligns with their principles and personal self-interest (Marson et al., 2021). The idea of financial capacity building has been defined in various ways, making it difficult to quantify, as the concept encompasses a wide range of techniques and competencies that vary depending on the individual's context and personal circumstances. Marson

et al. (2021) maintain that it primarily involves financial judgements and expertise that extends beyond specialized financial tasks like accounting, budgeting, costing, and fundamentals like counting money to more advanced practices like handling a chequebook and even more complicated tasks like choosing investments. It can be difficult to evaluate the idea of financial capacity building because of its conceptual complexity and the variety of disciplines that are involved. A number of systematic evaluations for enhancing financial capacity have been created recently (Gibson, 2022).

4. Review of related literature

4.1 Understanding social investment in social development

The Nordic welfare state regimes have a long history of social investment, even if the term was not coined until the 1990s. The Nordic models of industrial modernization and labor market reforms were associated with social investment policies. In Sweden, these regulations were especially evident. The Swedish government chose to retrain people for new manufacturing techniques and assist them in moving to expanding regions, as opposed to providing subsidies for jobs in industries that were in decline. The transition to the information economy prompted governments to make investments in lifelong learning, covering early childhood to retirement. Early childhood education was a major focus, but caring for young children was also a top priority, and this goal was becoming increasingly apparent as more women entered the workforce. Thus, according to Choi et al. (2020), the agendas for work/family conciliation and lifelong learning encouraged one another.

In response to deindustrialization and rising unemployment, which started in the 1970s, Bismarckian welfare states implemented passive labor market policies, providing long-term unemployment benefits and placing a sizable percentage of elderly workers on disability pensions. Men's labor force participation rates declined as a result of this reaction, and there was a perceived crisis of inactivity. The tendency was similar in the continental countries, albeit the timing differed, with the Netherlands providing an early and stark example. Falling tax revenue and rising spending brought attention to the need for women's labor force participation and activation. In order to increase the number of women employed, additional part-time positions had to be created, and work or family conciliation rules had to be established.

Social democratic welfare states have led the way in every field, with Bismarckian governments following closely behind. The education and family expenditure of the liberal welfare states reached the OECD average, but they continued to spend significantly less on public employment services, training, and active labor market policy. In contrast to European and North American nations, East Asian nations developed their welfare states much later, and their developmentalist model placed a strong focus on energizing and safeguarding labor in order to promote economic expansion. But they continued to spend at relatively low levels (Choi et al., 2020).

Building an active welfare state as opposed to a passive one, or prioritizing pre-distribution over redistribution, or preparing as opposed to repairing, became the fundamental objectives of social investment (Hacker, 2011; Huber & Stephens, 2015; Morel, Palier, & Palme, 2012). The main goals of social investment are to: (1) educate a labor force that can perform new jobs in the knowledge economy, which promotes innovation and increases national economies' competitiveness; (2) increase employment levels in society by integrating women, young people, and the unemployed into the labor force through the provision of specific support services, such as child care, job training, retraining, and relocation; and (3) use these measures to enable people to earn a living rather than relying on state transfers and to prevent inequality from rising to ever-higher levels (Choi et al., 2020).

4.2 How social assistance works for School Feeding Programs

Social protection constitutes a systematic effort to lessen the prevalence and intensity of poverty. Thus, it contributes to a substantial corpus of literature on the description, justification, and identification of the impoverished; and consequently, to decades of theoretical and empirical research on the factors that foster long-term poverty alleviation. There are three major schools of thought that are pertinent to poverty analysis: risk and vulnerability; social exclusion and cohesiveness; and political economy and governance. Social assistance is a subset of social protection that includes government initiatives aimed at mitigating deprivation by providing resources to marginalized populations. Low income or other aspects of poverty (such as social or nutritional status) can also be used to describe deprivation (Norton and associates, 2001).

Many country studies have demonstrated the importance of social assistance in mitigating the effects of crises on the less privileged and impoverished populations. Through loans, grants, and technical assistance, development agencies have significantly aided various countries with their social assistance programs. In order to shield the weak and impoverished from the effects of food shortages, high fuel costs, earthquakes, cyclones, and tsunamis, assistance has been provided during or after crises and disasters. There are five categories of social assistance programs: (1) household or individual-based programs; (2) targeted and means-tested or universal programs; (3) conditional or unconditional aid; (4) tied or non-tied programs; and (5) temporary or indefinite assistance (Handayani & Burkley, 2010).

School feeding programs, or SFPs, have been found to be economical social assistance initiatives that protect vulnerable children from hunger by offering wholesome meals to children and teenagers who attend school on a regular basis. According to Sumberg & Sabates-Wheeler (2011) and WFP (2020), a Home-grown School Feeding Program (HGSFP) is an SFP that is linked to local food purchases or agricultural development. Local economies benefit from such a program (Masset & Gelli, 2013). In many high-income nations with low rates of malnutrition, school feeding (SF) is a vital component of national social protection systems (WFP, 2013b). With targeted procurement, HGSFP boosts the local economy at the community level while giving smallholder farmers access to markets. Moreover, the

program fosters improved eating habits and nutrition education. It also supports agricultural diversification, with a focus on regional crops (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] & WFP, 2018; Desalegn et al., 2022).

Key stakeholders of HGSFPs include the Ministries of Agriculture, Education, and Health. Creating a market for locally generated goods through school meals is one way to promote local agricultural output. However, some critical requirements are needed in order to get the intended results. For instance, small-scale farmers in selected regions/districts need to be provided with inputs like improved seed and fertilisers which are crucial to increasing production capacity (Desalegn et al, 2022; Partnership for Child Development [PCD], 2013).

5. Theoretical framework

The study's theoretical framework was the endogenous growth theory. In the 1980s, endogenous growth theory was developed as a rival to neoclassical growth theory. It questioned how investment in physical capital, such as infrastructure, is subject to declining returns, and how wealth disparities between rich and undeveloped countries could continue. As an economic theory, it contends that internal dynamics within a system directly lead to economic progress. More precisely, the theory states that the creation of new technologies and productive and efficient methods of production will result from the improvement of a country's human capital. Paul Romer, an economist, argued that scientific advancements on their own do not always lead to technical transformation. He aimed to demonstrate how government initiatives, such as funding for Research and Development (R&D) and legislation protecting intellectual property, encouraged endogenous innovation and sustained economic growth (Burgess & Barbier, 2001; Liberto, 2023; Ramirez, 2006).

Thus, a new understanding of what drives economic growth was provided by the endogenous growth hypothesis. It argued that internal factors, such as human capital, creativity, and investment capital, rather than outside, unpredictable variables, determine a sustained pace of development. The theory's proponents contend that higher investments in human capital and faster innovation are directly related to increases in productivity. As a result, they support organizations in the public and commercial sectors that promote innovation efforts and provide incentives for people and companies to be more creative. According to the theory, investing in people has a domino effect that keeps producing profits in a knowledge-based economy. For this reason, key knowledge-based businesses like education, entrepreneurship, and other related fields are essential to the expansion and development of the economy (Liberto, 2023).

In applying the theory, the study maintains that the NHGSFP serves as a social investment instrument of government for the beneficiary groups aimed at fostering human capital development. It accomplishes this for the primary beneficiary group, which consists of schoolchildren, by enhancing their diet and

general health, which in turn improves their academic performance and cognitive function, increases their attendance at school, and eventually results in a workforce that is more competent and effective. Economic growth and progress are largely dependent on a workforce that is well-fed and educated. As a result, school feeding programs help create a more skilled and productive populace. With respect to the secondary beneficiary groups (farmers, food vendors, and distributors), school feeding programs can empower these participants by offering them jobs in agriculture and food processing, and encouraging the population's consumption of climate-smart, locally grown foods. School feeding programs have the potential to boost local economies and redirect focus on sourcing food locally, as well as assist local farmers and businesses by increasing their expertise in these areas.

6. Methodology

The study employed a mixed methodology comprising of both survey and documentary research designs. Thus, data were derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources involved the use of the questionnaire instrument and interviews. The population of the study was 257,000 consisting of 150,000 farmers and 107,000 food vendors and distributors (food aggregators and suppliers) (Barnabas et al., 2023). Using Glenn's (1992; 2009) sample size table, the sample size of 400 was derived at $\pm 5\%$ Precision Level and 95% Confidence Level (i.e. population size $>100,000$ at $\pm 5\%$ as shown in Table 1 below). The use of a sample size table, such as the one created by Glenn is justified by the fact that it offers a rapid and simple method of figuring out the right sample size for a study while maintaining a balance between resource limitations and statistical correctness.

Table 1: Glenn sample size table

Size of Population	Sample Size (n) for Precision (e) of:			
	$\pm 3\%$	$\pm 5\%$	$\pm 7\%$	$\pm 10\%$
500	a	222	145	83
600	a	240	152	86
700	a	255	158	88
800	a	267	163	89
900	a	277	166	90
1000	a	286	169	91
2000	714	333	185	95
3000	811	353	191	97
4000	870	364	194	98
5000	909	370	196	98
6000	938	375	197	98
7000	959	378	198	99
8000	976	381	199	99
9000	989	383	200	99
10,000	1,000	385	200	99
15,000	1,034	390	201	99
20,000	1,053	392	204	100
25,000	1,064	394	204	100
50,000	1,087	397	204	100
100,000	1,099	398	204	100
$>100,000$	1,111	400	204	100
a = Assumption of normal population is poor (Yamane, 1967). The entire population should be sampled.				

Source: Glenn, 1992.

Regarding sample size distribution, six states from the six geopolitical regions were purposively selected: Kaduna, Taraba, Benue, Enugu, Oyo and Edo States. The sample size distribution Per State and Per Category is illustrated table 2 below:

Table 2: Sample size distribution (For questionnaires)

States	Farmers	Food Vendors	Distributors	Total (Per State)
Kaduna	23	22	22	67
Taraba	23	22	22	67
Benue	23	22	22	67
Enugu	23	22	22	67
Oyo	22	22	22	66
Edo	22	22	22	66
Total (Per Category)	136	132	132	400

Source: Field survey blueprint, 2024

For the interviews carried out, 3 respondents per category, totaling 9 respondents were randomly selected from the respective states, and interviewed to further validate information derived from the questionnaires. Table 3 presents an elaborate structure of how the interview sample size distribution was done.

Table 3: Sample size distribution (For interviews)

States	Farmers	Food Vendors	Distributors	Total (Per State)
Kaduna	1	0	1	2
Taraba	0	1	0	1
Benue	1	0	1	2
Enugu	0	1	0	1
Oyo	1	0	1	2
Edo	0	1	0	1
Total (Per Category)	3	3	3	9

Source: Field survey blueprint, 2024

Secondary sources on the other hand involved the use of publications of the National Social Investment Program Agency (NSIPA) in Nigeria. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics and content analysis. Descriptive statistics were applied primarily in analysis of field survey data. Descriptive statistics are concise informational coefficients that provide an overview of a specific data collection, which may be a sample of the population or a representation of the complete population. There are two types of descriptive statistics: measures of variability and measures of central tendency. Specifically, Arithmetic Weighted Mean and percentages, which both fall under the category of measures of central tendency, were used as the descriptive statistics approaches. Content analysis, on the other hand, was applied mainly in qualitative analysis of secondary data obtained from publications of NSIPA. Content analysis is a research method that examines communication, such as texts, visual content, or audio

recordings, to uncover patterns, themes, and interpretations. It can be used to quantify the existence of certain aspects while also exploring the content's broader context and significance.

7. Discussions and findings

7.1 Policy objectives of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP) in Nigeria.

The goal of the NHGSFP is to provide an affordable school feeding program that is led by the government, with a particular emphasis on smallholder farmer development and local procurement to promote economic growth in the area. Though its primary goal is to feed children, this food-based safety net program will also contribute secondarily to increased food security in the households it covers. The NHGSFP is expected to benefit a multitude of stakeholders. Nigeria Home Grown School Feeding Strategic Plan 2016-2020 (2016) states that communities will benefit from new jobs across the supply chain, such as catering, processing, and food handling jobs; children will benefit from a hot, nutritionally balanced school meal; and farmers will benefit from improved access to school feeding markets.

In summary, the main objectives of the NHGSP are:

1. Enrolment and completion of school: The program seeks to increase primary school enrolment in Nigeria and reduce the country's estimated 30% primary school dropout rate.
2. Child health and nutrition: By addressing the poor health and nutrition that many children face, the initiative hopes to enhance learning results.
3. Local agricultural production: Connecting the program to this sector of the economy can be advantageous not just for the children but also for the community at large. By establishing a ready and viable market through the school feeding program, the program seeks to increase local agricultural output and farmers' revenue.
4. Increasing employment and strengthening the family and state economies: The program multiplies the effects of economic growth and development by generating employment opportunities along the value chain.

In addition to the immediate advantages, the Nigeria Home Grown School Feeding Strategic Plan 2016-2020 (2016) aims to leverage the NHGSFP as a major catalyst for two main initiatives: (i) Agriculture-nutrition policies, considering the direct nutritional components of HGSF menus; and (ii) smallholder market participation with positive drive for increased public agriculture commodity procurement.

To ensure the program's successful execution, the Federal Government, State Governments, and Local Governments will collaborate. Since each state is now at a different level of the HGSF design and implementation, the suggested technique will enable all states to participate in organized discourse that will facilitate national learning. The Federal Government of Nigeria therefore expects that all interested parties will support this strategy and work together to make it a success. The Federal Government's main

responsibilities are to set standards and guidelines, create policies, offer budgetary support for up to 100% of the feeding cost, and offer technical assistance for all program aspects.

It is intended that State Governments will create and carry out State-specific initiatives that adhere to the federally developed principles. Additionally, it is anticipated that the relevant State Governments would offer the financial and administrative assistance required to increase the program's coverage across grade levels. Every governmental level will carry out a sustainability planning process with the aim of creating a guideline that clarifies the capacity requirements in the medium-term. The projected implementation and expansion of HGSF in Nigeria, as well as the strategy for ensuring long-term viability, would be upheld by these plans. A Local Government Area's school community will be in charge of carrying out the program's actual implementation, oversight, and monitoring as well as encouraging community involvement and engagement (Nigeria Home Grown School Feeding Strategic Plan, 2016-2020).

7.2 Implementation of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP) and its performance in enhancing financial capacity building in Nigeria

Assessing the implementation of the NHGSFP, as a social assistance policy of government in Nigeria, was done through a field survey. Opinions were sampled from stakeholders of the program such as farmers, food vendors and distributors so as to establish its impact on financial capacity building in Nigeria. Thus, emphasis was placed on category rather than states as these groups constitute the crux of the study. Although a total of 400 questionnaires were administered – i.e. 136 to farmers, 132 to food vendors and 132 to distributors – the return rate was 126 for farmers, 120 for food vendors and 120 for distributors, representing 93%, 91% and 91% respectively. The responses from the questionnaires issued are examined below:

Table 4: Farmers and financial capacity building in the NHGSFP

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Counts	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Remarks
1	Training on production/ service delivery methods	16	16	21	73	126	227	1.80	Strongly Disagree
2	Specialized financial capacity training	16	21	27	62	126	243	1.93	Strongly Disagree
3	Increased capacity in occupation	45	58	12	11	126	389	3.08	Agree
4	Increased investment	20	19	22	65	126	246	1.95	Strongly Disagree
5	Expansion in business venture	13	17	36	60	126	235	1.87	Strongly Disagree

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 4 shows an assessment of the impact of the NHGSFP on farmers. From the table, it can be seen that 16 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP promoted training on production/ service delivery

methods, 16 respondents agreed on the issue, 21 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 73 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 1.80 falls within the strongly disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not promoted training on production/ service delivery methods for farmers.

In the second item in table 4, 16 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP fostered specialized financial capacity training on production/ service delivery methods, 21 respondents agreed on the issue, 27 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 62 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 1.93 falls within the strongly disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not fostered specialized financial capacity training on production/ service delivery methods for farmers.

In the third item in table 4, 45 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP increased capacity in occupation, 58 respondents agreed on the issue, 12 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 11 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 3.08 falls within the agree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has increased capacity in the occupation of farmers.

In the fourth item in table 4, 20 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP increased investment opportunities. 19 respondents agreed on the issue, 22 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 65 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 1.95 falls within the strongly disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not increased investment opportunities for farmers.

In the fifth item in table 4, 13 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP led to expansion in business venture. 17 respondents agreed on the issue, 36 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 60 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 1.87 falls within the strongly disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not led to expansion in the business venture of farmers.

In the final analysis, it can be extrapolated from the weighted mean scores of the 5 items presented that majority of responses indicated “strongly disagree”. Thus, it can be maintained that the NHGSFP has not significantly impacted on the financial capacity building of farmers in Nigeria.

Table 5: Food vendors and financial capacity building in the NHGSFP

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Counts	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Remarks
1	Training on production/ service delivery methods	15	20	46	39	120	251	2.09	Disagree
2	Specialized financial capacity training	10	20	37	53	120	227	1.74	Strongly Disagree
3	Increased capacity in occupation	16	16	45	43	120	245	2.04	Disagree

4	Increased investment	10	31	45	34	120	257	2.14	Disagree
5	Expansion in business venture	14	18	37	51	120	235	1.96	Strongly Disagree

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 5 shows an assessment of the impact of the NHGSFP on food vendors. From the table, it can be seen that 15 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP promoted training on production/ service delivery methods, 20 respondents agreed on the issue, 46 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 39 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 2.09 falls within the disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not promoted training on production/ service delivery methods for food vendors.

In the second item in table 5, 10 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP fostered specialized financial capacity training on production/ service delivery methods, 20 respondents agreed on the issue, 37 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 53 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 1.74 falls within the strongly disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not fostered specialized financial capacity training on production/ service delivery methods for food vendors.

In the third item in table 5, 16 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP increased capacity in occupation, 16 respondents agreed on the issue, 45 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 43 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 2.04 falls within the disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not increased capacity in the occupation of food vendors.

In the fourth item in table 5, 10 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP increased investment opportunities. 31 respondents agreed on the issue, 45 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 34 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 2.14 falls within the disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not increased investment opportunities for food vendors.

In the fifth item in table 5, 14 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP led to expansion in business venture. 18 respondents agreed on the issue, 37 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 51 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 1.96 falls within the strongly disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not led to expansion in the business venture of food vendors.

In the final analysis, it can be extrapolated from the weighted mean scores of the 5 items presented that majority of responses indicated “disagree”. Thus, it can be maintained that the NHGSFP has not significantly impacted on the financial capacity building of food vendors in Nigeria.

Table 6: Distributors and financial capacity building in the NHGSFP

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Counts	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Remarks
1	Training on production/ service delivery methods	10	19	44	47	120	232	1.93	Strongly Disagree
2	Specialized financial capacity training	12	14	46	48	120	230	1.92	Strongly Disagree
3	Increased capacity in occupation	21	29	34	36	120	275	2.29	Disagree
4	Increased investment	28	21	36	35	120	282	2.35	Disagree
5	Expansion in business venture	20	20	42	38	120	262	2.18	Disagree

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 6 shows an assessment of the impact of the NHGSFP on distributors. From the table, it can be seen that 10 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP promoted training on production/ service delivery methods, 19 respondents agreed on the issue, 44 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 47 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 1.93 falls within the strongly disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not promoted training on production/ service delivery methods for distributors.

In the second item in table 6, 12 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP fostered specialized financial capacity training on production/ service delivery methods, 14 respondents agreed on the issue, 46 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 48 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 1.92 falls within the strongly disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not fostered specialized financial capacity training on production/ service delivery methods for distributors.

In the third item in table 6, 21 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP increased capacity in occupation, 29 respondents agreed on the issue, 34 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 36 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 2.29 falls within the disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not increased capacity in the occupation of distributors.

In the fourth item in table 6, 28 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP increased investment opportunities. 21 respondents agreed on the issue, 36 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 35 respondents strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 2.35 falls within the disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not increased investment opportunities for distributors.

In the fifth item in table 6, 20 respondents strongly agreed that the NHGSFP led to expansion in business venture. 20 respondents agreed on the issue, 42 respondents disagreed on the issue, and 38 respondents

strongly disagreed on the issue. The weighted mean score of 2.18 falls within the disagree range. This implies that the NHGSFP has not led to expansion in the business venture of distributors.

In the final analysis, it can be extrapolated from the weighted mean scores of the 5 items presented that majority of responses indicated “disagree”. Thus, it can be maintained that the NHGSFP has not significantly impacted on the financial capacity building of distributors in Nigeria.

Regarding the interviews conducted, 3 respondents per category, totaling 9 were assessed on the impact of the NHGSFP on financial capacity building of the secondary beneficiary groups (i.e. farmers, food vendors and distributors). These respondents were drawn from the same groups used for the questionnaire. Table 7 presents the views of respondents on the subject matter.

Table 7: Limiting factors of the NHGSFP for financial capacity building

S/N	Interview responses	Frequency	Percentage
1	Poor multisectoral collaboration/ partnerships	6	67
2	Lethargic political commitment	7	78
3	Low investment in the program	8	89
4	Absence of holistic approach in the implementation process	8	89
5	Insufficient Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)	7	78
Total		9	100

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 7 above indicates that 6 respondents representing 67% argued that the NHGSFP has not positively transformed the financial capacity prospects of secondary beneficiaries due to poor multisectoral collaboration and partnerships. Numerous actors, such as local communities, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies, are frequently involved in HGSFPs. However, the operations of the NHGSFP do not only show poor collaboration between the public and private sectors, but also the long existing relegation of the informal sector in national development. Ineffective multisectoral cooperation has resulted in problems with financing, execution, oversight, and sustainability in general. Low community involvement, inadequate supporting infrastructure, and poor stakeholder advocacy/ awareness campaigns have all been consequences of a lack of cooperation.

7 respondents representing 78% posited that the NHGSFP has not created the desired impact on secondary beneficiary groups because of lethargic political support. Although the program depends on the synergy of various actors in various sectors, the government plays a central role in its implementation. That is to say that the government’s input largely determines the success of the program. However, the government has not lived up to expectations for social investment programs in Nigeria, as evidenced by its National Poverty Index (NPI) that has continued to increase over the years. Social investment, although echoed as a primary concern of government, is not given the required commitment in terms of willpower and desire to foster social development. The foundation of HGSFP implementation and sustainability is political commitment. Without it, these initiatives run the danger of being poorly executed, underfunded, and eventually failing to meet their objectives.

8 respondents representing 89% avered that low financial investment in the NHGSFP has limited the benefits to the secondary beneficiary groups. Reduced program coverage, restricted effects on health and education, and hampered local economic growth are just a few of the detrimental effects of low financial investment. Due to financial limitations, fewer people are given the opportunity to sign up to support the program, and this has left many people without access to sources of income and meaningful livelihoods. Efforts to boost local economies and establish a viable existence is jeopardized if HGSFPs are unable to adequately assist local farmers and enterprises. Programs with inadequate funding are more likely to have long-term sustainability issues. This restriction necessitates a significant reliance on outside financing sources, which can be erratic and challenging to sustain.

8 respondents representing 89% stated that the absence of a holistic approach in the implementation process has served as a drawback of the program in yielding high benefits for the secondary beneficiary groups. HGSFPs aim to have long-term effects on food security, nutrition, and local economy. To establish a unified and effective approach, agriculture, nutrition, and education strategies must be integrated. But the implementation of the NHGSFP clearly shows the absence of policy coherence as more emphasis is placed on education policy at the detriment of local economies.

Lastly, 7 respondents representing 78% pointed out that insufficient Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) has hindered maximum benefits of the NHGSFP to secondary beneficiary groups. Program accountability to stakeholders, funders, and the general public depends on adequate M&E. It makes it easier to show how resources are being spent and whether the program is accomplishing its objectives. However, the NHGSFP's uneven reporting and wide range of data collection techniques have produced inaccurate data, making it challenging to evaluate the program's efficacy. It has become challenging to monitor progress, pinpoint areas that require development, and guarantee that resources are being used effectively due to flawed M&E methodologies. These errors present a serious problem since they impair the program's efficacy and accountability.

Thus, in the final analysis, it can be established that the interviews carried out corroborated the information derived from the questionnaires administered. Summarily, the interview findings maintained that the NHGSFP has not significantly impacted on the financial capacity of targeted groups like farmers, food vendors and distributors who are critical stakeholders in the program's value chain.

7.3 Strategies for improving the functionality of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP) to foster financial capacity building in Nigeria

Data presented and analysed in the last section shows the existence of policy gaps in the implementation of the NHGSFP. With more focus on children's school enrolment and completion, and children's nutrition and health, the position of farmers in local agricultural production and food vendors/distributors in the value chain is relegated and only considered to be a secondary objective. But the roles

of these groups largely determine the overall success of the program. Thus, the following strategies should be adopted to reposition the program for more inclusiveness of these groups.

Since the NHGSFP program is hinged on agricultural productivity, farmers should be exposed to modern techniques of food production. Contemporary farming methods for both crop and animal farming comes in as the first option here. Apart from training to be conversant with these farming methods, the farmers also need financial support as these farming methods are capital intensive. Government subsidies will be useful to achieve this goal. A focus on the farmers to produce at maximum capacity and manage their resources adequately to reinvest and expand their businesses will have a positive impact on the NHGSFP and also ensure its sustainability.

The food vendors are also as important as the farmers as they are directly responsible for processing raw agricultural produce to edible forms. The food vendors also require training that will help them improve in their functioning. The training here will be useful in improving food handling and general food hygiene, appropriate food packaging and rations, food mix and serving a balanced diet, human relations in providing such service, and a host of others. In relation to financial capacity building, this group can be exposed to financial management techniques such as costing, budgeting, record keeping and investment that is not only useful in sustaining the program, but that also equips the vendors with knowledge that makes them better entrepreneurs in this line of business. Such training could be provided by government or non government agencies, or a combination of both under partnership arrangements.

Distributors in the NHGSFP serve as middlemen between farmers and food vendors, and also between food vendors and government officials/ agencies managing the program. The distributors also require special training on financial management techniques/ approaches such as costing, budgeting, procurement and supplies, accounting, and reporting among others. Knowledge on these techniques/ approaches is deemed important to improve the financial capacity of participants as well as ensure program sustainability.

8. Summary of Findings

The study was aimed at assessing the impact of the NHGSFP on financial capacity building in Nigeria. It employed a mixed approach consisting of survey and documentary research designs as its methodology. Data collected and analysed revealed the following findings:

1. The policy objectives of the NHGSFP are designed primarily to ensure child school enrollment and completion, and child nutrition and health. However, the objectives extend to cover the financial capacity building of supporting groups like farmers, food vendors and distributors in the value chain since the functions of these groups are critical for the success of the program.
2. The NHGSFP has not significantly impacted on the financial capacity building of supporting groups due to factors such as poor multisectoral collaboration/ partnerships, lethargic political

commitment, low financial investment in the initiative, absence of a holistic approach in the implementation process, and insufficient Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

3. A comprehensive policy review of the NHGSFP and the implementation of a balanced multistakeholder approach are strategies that can be adopted to restructure the program for improved functionality and enhanced financial capacity building.

9. Conclusion

The future of welfare states and the role of social spending now heavily depend on social investment. Regarded as a developing paradigm, it outlines the ideal institutional configuration for the welfare state and serves as a guide for the reorganization of current institutions and policies (Nolan, 2017). As social assistance initiatives, school feeding programs play a significant role in social investment. Nigeria's NHGSFP was created to solve the issue of falling rate of children's enrolment and completion in public primary schools. The program's blueprint for solving the problem embraced a multifaceted approach that also targeted financial capacity building for supporting groups. However, the supporting groups are relegated in the program's implementation process. A program review that gives primacy to supporting groups will be critical to reposition the NHGSFP for better performance and improved multiplier effect for economic growth and development. As a suggestion for further research, the study maintains that there is need for future investigation on social investment programs and their significance in the areas of entrepreneurship. It is also germane to explore the role of the private sector in complementing public sector efforts to promote the gains of social investment programs.

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DECLARATION OF ETHICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES RESPONSIBILITY

The author(s) declare that all stages of the preparation of this study were carried out in compliance with ethical rules and the principles of scientific citation. In the event of any violation, the *Journal of Social Policy* bears no responsibility; all responsibility lies with the author(s) of the article.