

**TITLE OF THE PROJECT: NEED FOR LUNCH FOR ALL
PRIMARY-GOING CHILDREN. A CASE OF FOUR
SCHOOLS IN NSANGI SUB-COUNTY – WAKISO
DISTRICT**

BATCH 11

TEAM MEMBERS:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1997, the government of Uganda introduced a policy of free primary learning, a condition of Universal Primary Education that led to school enrolments to more than double. However, despite the quantitative improvements, there seem to have been inadequate planning for the programme. One of the issues that was not given due consideration is the right of the child to health living. There was no clear policy in regard to feeding the children while they are at school.

A project was carried out in Nsangi Sub-country Wakiso district Uganda to raise a voice for the innocent children who are often sent to school without anything to eat and therefore spend the whole of their working day hungry and angry. Four schools were identified and the change agents established a working relationship with the school management. Through the efforts of the headteachers and school management committees (SMCs), sensitization workshops were carried out for teachers, school children and parents.

Eventually many parents accepted to make contributions for their children's feeding which has improved on pupils' participation in class work, school attendance and interest in activities outside class, such as playing. Headteachers have also acknowledged that since the inception of the project the general school atmosphere has lightened-up and is more conducive for learning. SIDA and Lund University, thanks for facilitating us to enable a few children smile.

Background

Foreign travelers, missionaries and explorers to East and Central Africa including Uganda observed and recorded an abundance of foodstuffs including crops, livestock, poultry, fish, wild game and wild fruits and vegetables which provided adequate and balanced diets to individuals most of the time. In his report of 1907, Winston Churchill observed that with her richness of the soil and the abundance of water, Uganda must one day become the great center of tropical production, and play a most important part in the economic development of the whole world. Thus Churchill called Uganda the ‘pearl’ of Africa (Ssekamwa 2008).

It is also important to note that children in traditional Africa, Uganda in particular were regarded as a blessing from the gods. Consequently, all adults were obliged to beget children, for having no children was regarded as a curse (Mbiti 1992). Thus all families ensured that their children were well looked-after, that is to say, were well clothed, fed and given sufficient medical care in relation to their circumstances.

However, the attitude towards children in Uganda has changed over time. A number of factors including the introduction of western education, politics of manipulation, ignorance and poverty are said to be behind such changes (Mamdani 2007). All these factors at different degrees have led to a situation where children are neglected either deliberately or with on serious intent.

Generally, reports indicate that Ugandans are eating less not only in quantity but in quality as well. *Ipsa facto*, the level of under-nutrition especially among children, who need balanced diets for their physical and mental development, has risen to high levels which are disturbing and unacceptable. UNICEF reports, for example, give a detailed picture of this sad development in a country that was once the “Pearl of Africa”. Twenty percent of children under-five suffered moderate and severe underweight; 32 percent suffered moderate and severe stunting between 2000 and 2006; and the percentage of infants with low birth weight stood at 12 between 1999 and 2006 (UNICEF 2009).

The United Nations General Assembly adopted on December 10, 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In article 25, the Declaration proclaimed the right to adequate food as an indispensable element of the right of everyone. It also stressed that motherhood and children are entitled to special care and assistance. In article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966 imposes on its State Parties the obligation to take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of the right to adequate food for everyone. Furthermore, At the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996 world leaders agreed to reduce in half by 2015 the number of chronically undernourished people in the developing countries. On September 8, 2000 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration and reconfirmed the resolve to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015 (UNICEF 2009).

In conformity with these global instruments, the Uganda government has taken appropriate legislative measures. The Constitution of 1995 requires that “The state shall take appropriate steps to encourage people to grow and store adequate food, establish national food reserves; and encourage and promote nutrition through mass education and other appropriate means in order to build a healthy state”. And the Uganda children’s Statute of 1996 gives the child (below the age of 18) the right to adequate diet.

However, the implementation of these provisions has fallen far short of expectation. An increasing number of Ugandans are not eating enough in quantity and quality terms. It has been reported that over seven million Ugandans eat one unbalanced meal a day and over 2.7 million school going- children are suffering from extreme deprivation and food insecurity. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF 2009) produced an authoritative report in 2009, showing that twenty percent of under-five children in Uganda suffer moderate and severe underweight, 32 percent suffer moderate and severe stunting while 12 percent of infants suffer from low birth-weight, meaning that their mothers are undernourished. Children who do not eat balanced diets are handicapped physically and mentally and cannot learn properly. Clearly this is not the way to prepare our future generations.

The challenge of lack of lunch among primary school-going children in Uganda

Well as the problem of feeding seems to be cross cutting and affecting a big number of the population in Uganda, our project focused more on school going children. Giving children lunch at school is believed to be a powerful social safety for it does not only sustain a child's physical and mental development, but improves on the child's school attendance. A study that was reported by The Times & The Sunday Times showed that the performance of 11-year-old pupils eating meals at school improved by up to 8% in science and as much as 6% in English, while absenteeism due to ill-health fell by 15% (Waite 2009). In addition, a daily school meal provides a strong incentive for children to move and stay at school. Thus an adequate school meal boosts learning by allowing children to focus on their studies and not their stomachs.

Whereas the need for lunch for all school-going children seems to be obvious, the situation in many government schools in Uganda is different. In Wakiso district, which was the main focus of the project, majority of the children spend their 'working day' without any food. It is widely believed that children cannot concentrate in class on empty stomachs. The Editor of the New Vision Newspaper (Editor 2010) argues that while Universal Primary Education (UPE) is a good programme, providing free education without lunch is like giving UPE pupils 50%. These children need 100% (the full-package) if they are going to benefit academically and receive quality education from the programme.

It is also reported that failure to provide lunch has led to truancy, delinquency, poor health, poor performance, psychological distress, and a high school dropout rate. The drop-out rate has got so bad that eight out of 10 pupils who enrolled in P1 don't make it to P7 (New Vision, 14th December 2010)

The issue of providing lunch to pupils seems to have received little attention from all stakeholders. There is thus need to deconstruct and establish the root cause of this mass child-neglect. Whereas some teachers and politicians attribute this neglect to be a result of lack of awareness and clarity on the roles of the government and the parent towards the

child, others posit that a number of parents are too poor to provide meals for their children. While the government of Uganda feels that asking parents to contribute to children's meals may become a barrier to free UPE, parents on the other hand seem to be relieved if they are not asked to make any contribution. This is regardless of whether their children are given some thing to eat at school or not. As a result, children have become victims of circumstances.

Aims of the project:

It is important for all Ugandans, especially the leaders, parents, school management committees and teachers to have the awareness that lunch for all school-going children is one of the basic principles of all human rights that cannot be faulted. Thus the project intended to increase stakeholders' awareness about Child Rights Conventions highlighting more specifically the children's need to take lunch at school. The project was committed at taking an extra mile to let parents, teachers and politicians know that whereas children learn better by individual participation; this cannot be achieved unless children are given some thing to eat at school.

Besides, the team members identified a big gap in teacher education institutions in regard to CRC. Thus, they committed to creating awareness about CRC among staff and teacher trainees in both Kibuli Primary Teacher's College and School of Education, Makerere University. It was expected that once the teacher trainees were brought into this enlightenment, the concern of CRC would gradually be cascaded to the whole country.

Specific objectives

1. Enlighten school administrators, parents and local government officials about the 3 pillars of CRC namely, provision, protection and participation namely that
 - i) children have a right to be provided with food so as to be in position to learn effectively
 - ii) children have a right to protection from maltreatment and neglect that may arise from not being given meals at school

- iii) children have a right participate fully in all school activities as a result of being kept healthy through timely provision of meals.
- 2. Empower teachers to observe and enforce rights of the child both in and out of the classroom, and
- 3. To make pupils aware of their rights to provision, protection and participation from parents, school authorities and their community.

METHODOLOGY

According to our work plan, we agreed to do the following activities;

- a) Meeting colleagues at each one's work place
- b) Sensitization of stakeholders
- c) Piloting the resolutions deliberated upon
- d) Evaluation
- e) Report writing

A) MEETING COLLEAGUES

It was earlier agreed that as an initial stage of project implementation the three team members sensitize their workmates as the English saying goes, "Charity begins at home." This was premised on the fact that the intentions and content of CRC were relevant in the schools where all of us worked. Below is a belief about what each member did.

Peter Ssenkusu (School of Education – Makerere University).

In the first week of November Peter sought audience with the Head of Department (HOD) to brief him about what transpired in Sweden about CRC. However, the HOD seemed not to be interested about the issue. So Peter decided to meet members of staff individually. Out of 16 members, 7 welcomed the idea and eventually some aspects about CRC were included in the curriculum during the restructuring of courses at the beginning of 2010. It must be noted, that CRC was not part of the curriculum before.

The experience of CRC influenced Peter's teaching as an individual and also some members in the department including Dr Mugagga (who is a change agent Batch 13). Instead of traditional lecturing we now give chance to the teacher-trainees to take an active role in their learning, with the hope that they will do the same once they begin their practice. There is no doubt that the student-teachers are happy about the

participatory-approach of learning which is less stressing and yet trains them to be more critical.

Ben Ssentongo (Nsangi Mixed Primary School)

Ben met his staff on the 16th of November, 2009. It was an exciting experience to share this with the teachers because they had already received similar encounters when Batch 9 selected the school for their project. The teachers through their discussions showed that they were already aware of the problems regarding the many pupils who were going out without lunch at school. They suggested that the parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members be met and briefed about the need for lunch for all pupils. Two weeks later, a meeting was called. Many suggestions were made, but at the end it was resolved that since the term was already half way, parents agreed to pay 5000/- that would be used to prepare porridge for the pupils. The parents promised to revisit the issue during the end of year meeting and resolve on how payments would be made in 2010.

Namata Betty (Kibuli Primary Teacher's College-PTC)

Betty organized a workshop for tutors at Kibuli PTC which covered the following points.

- breaking the walls of the classroom while teaching
- Leadership and life skills
- Lunch for learners
- Need for team work

The following week, there was a workshop for over 600 college students about CRC. In both meetings, the ideas were well received and Betty promised to work closely with the tutors to ensure that the program becomes a success.

B) SENSITATION OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FOUR PROJECT SCHOOLS

i) Selection of schools

The project targeted government primary schools that were perceived to be looking after children from less privileged families. It was thought that probably such families would tend to neglect the needs of their children than the well-to-do families. Thus initially five schools were selected for the project. These included St. Jude Nakasozi P/S, Nkonya P/S, Mugongo P/S, Nsangi Mixed P/S and St. Joseph's Nabbingo Boarding P/S. However, when we visited St. Joseph's Nabbingo P/S, we found that majority of the pupils were in the boarding section and therefore these were always provided with lunch. Although half of the day pupils were not having meals at school, the headmistress told us that their SMC had previously sat and had made it mandatory for all parents to pay the termly fee for lunch. Thus we did not want to waste energy 'preaching to the converted'.

ii) Category of stake holders

- **Pupils:** These were the center of focus. They were briefed about their rights. We thought this would empower them not only to convince their parents but also remind their teachers about their crucial needs such as lunch.
- **Teachers:** These were seen as important since most of the time they are the ones to keep with the children while at school.
- **Headteachers:** are the key in establishing a friendly school that is guided by CRC principles. They were also seen as important since they served as the main link to the parents and policy makers.
- **SMC:** These are important because they set local policies that govern the school.
- **Parents:** These share the direct responsibility with government to facilitate the learning of the children.

NB. In a situation where all stakeholders would not be met, we used the cascade method. For example, by sensitizing the headteachers and SMC members, it was assumed that they would take time to convey the message to their teaching staff.

iii) Procedure

As seen in the previous section, the purpose of this project was to work with school heads, teachers, SMC, parents and learners to ensure that the numbers of those who take lunch goes up. We made a number of visits to the project schools. However, for every school we made sure that the following were achieved:

- (i) Create a good working relationship with school management
- (ii) Sell our ideas about CRC, but pay more attention to the issue of providing lunch for all pupils
- (iii) Receive opinions and suggestions from all stakeholders
- (iv) Set dates for possible follow-up meetings

Given that both Betty and Ben had special responsibilities in Nsangi sub-county, we did not find a very hard task to get established in the project schools.

iv) Justification of our approach

Well aware of the problem at hand, we thought it better to improve on the situation of children who were not getting lunch at school by creating wide awareness among all stakeholders. Thus every stakeholder was given chance during the sensitization workshop to suggest the best way children would be looked after at school. In other words the method emphasized the importance of individual and collective contribution to improving the care given to the children, a mode reflective to the historical, cultural and social context of the school and its learners. By ensuring active participation of the stakeholders, we also wanted to create programs that would be sustainable in the schools even after the end of the project.

v) Role of the team members

As mentioned before these proposals came from the community, that is, parents and SMC members. During the meetings the team members only introduced CRC issues and pupils' lunch and set the meeting off. The team would also come in to clarify or emphasize a point, which created space for schools to own the project.

Another duty of the team was to show the parents how children who were not having meals at school were at risk. We always emphasized the following points for children who missed lunch at school: possible physical retardation, social withdrawal, getting peptic ulcers and more important, the likelihood for academic failure resulting from lack of concentration especially in the afternoons, failure to finish assignments and dropping out of school.

Another common discussion was about whether it was government or the parents that were responsible for feeding children at school. Whereas a number of parents argued that Universal Primary Education also included meals, it was made clear that as per Uganda's Education Act, 2008, it was their [parents] responsibility to provide lunch for the children

vi) Points of emphasis

In all the meetings, the following points were taken as vital

- a) The three Ps: Participation, Provision and Protection
- b) The need to be aware of the individual needs of the learners to enable them develop normally
- c) Basing on the CRC pillar of protection, both parents and teachers were advised not to treat or even punish their children harshly.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Parents tended agree on implementing practices that more or less fitted their incomes and the way they valued education.

Majority of the stake holders, including SMC members and parents in the four schools tended to suggest some of the following ways.

- (i) Parents packing food for their children
- (ii) Paying money to school administration to prepare a common meal for children
- (iii) Bringing food crops especially maize and beans to school by parents, for those who were farmers
- (iv) Starting a school garden that would be maintained by parents and school children. The harvest would be turned into children's lunch. This however was a long term plan.

The following are the findings;

NKONYA PRIMARY SCHOOL

SMC members and Parents' resolutions was as follows

- a) Those who can afford agreed to pay 5000/= for porridge.
- b) Those who cannot afford can bring food in kind e.g. maize flour, beans etc.
- c) A few of the parents preferred to pack daily for their children

Situation in November 2009: The school enrolment was 193. Before the project begun 08 pupils from p..1 – p.3 were getting meals from school. Then 13 pupils in p.4 – p.7.

Situation in June 2010: Number of those who were getting meals had changed a lot. It was recorded that between P.1 to P.3, the number had increased to 31, while P.4 to P.7 were 64.

ST. JUDE NAKASOZI.

SMC members and Parents' resolutions

- a) That P.1 to P2 pay 5000/- for porridge per term
- b) Those in P.3 to P7 pay 10000 for solid lunch (posho and beans).
- c) Parents also gave room to those who were able to pay for both break porridge and lunch for P.3 and P.4. children in middle school. These were required to pay 15000.

Situation in November 2009: 21 pupils were taking porridge from P.1 and P.2, while 42 were taking lunch – P.3 to P7.

Situation in June 2010: There was a remarkable change as P.1 to P2 more than doubled (45) and P.3 to P.7 slightly increased to 59. By this time no parents had been in position to pay for both porridge and lunch for children in middle school.

NB. It should be noted that both Nkonya P/S and St. Jude Nakasozzi P/S are very modest schools, where most of the children are orphans whose guardians often have petty jobs. Thus, parents/guardian's response towards pupil's lunch was seen to be a remarkable improvement.

MUGONGO PRIMARY SCHOOL

SMC members and parents resolutions

- a) That parents pay 10,000 for all pupils who were to take porridge
- b) That parents pay 22000 for solid lunch.
- c) Lunch for P.7 pupils was made mandatory

Situation in November 2009: We found that out of 1200 pupils 700 were being fed at school. That is to say, 332 pupils were getting porridge and 368 were receiving lunch from school.

Situation in June 2010:

By June the situation had improved steadily. P.1 to P2. 441 were taking porridge, while 467 were taking lunch at school. In addition, by this time all P.7 pupils were taking lunch at school. P.7 is considered important because it is the year students sit for national exams that can enable them to continue to secondary school.

NSANGI MIXED P/S

SMC members and parents resolutions

- a) Parents agreed to pay 10,000 for porridge for learners in P.1 to P2
- b) Parents agreed to pay 15000 for solid lunch for pupils in P.3 to P.7. Parents also gave the allowance of paying in three installments that is 5000 per month.

Situation in November 2009: out of a total population of 778 learners at Nsangi Mixed P/S, 110 pupils were taking porridge while 187 were taking lunch at school

Situation in June 2010: P.1 to P.2 numbers had increased slightly to 156, while P.3 to P.7 pupils that were paid for to take lunch were 260.

General assessment of project impact

Mugongo P/S had the best performance in terms of numbers that could be supported to eat at school. However, in all ways it cannot be compared to the first two in terms of infrastructure and status of the parents. The community surrounding the school seemed to be better.

However, Nkonya P/S was rated the best overall. With very needy parents/guardians, the headteacher and the Chairman school management committee were able to mobilize them to respond to the issue of giving children lunch at school.

ANALYSIS

- Issues to do with the rights of the children are real and not just conceptual ideas. This was shown by the way stakeholders - more especially parents welcomed the ideas. There was no single moment we took more than 2 hours explaining to the parents about the 3 Ps for example. As soon as we introduced the issue they would come in to supplement and illustrate the issues citing examples from their own setting.
- For CRC issues to be well received, presentation matters. Our project concentrated of simple facts namely, children can learn better when they are healthy, satisfied. Thus together with the parents we agreed that the right to education also includes the right to lunch.
- What seemed to be complex, however, was the aspect of responsibility. That is to say, whose responsibility is it to feed children at school? Whereas a number would accept that it was their responsibility, many more would still want to surrender their responsibility either to the government or the school.
- We also learnt that politics had played a big role in weakening or confusing the parents about their responsibility towards their children while at school. Many would cite the president of Uganda emphasizing that 'learning had been completely been made free' since 1997.
- The practice of giving children food at school is very vital for it helps everybody starting with the individual learner, the teachers, parents and school administration. Whereas many headteachers are aware of this, they need a strong school management committee to convince the parents to contribute towards children's lunch.
- Our experiences in the four project schools is that the learners are the best 'ambassadors' in transforming society about children's rights. In instances where children aired out their views about CRC through drama and singing, parents would get so moved. The lesson was that children need to be involved so actively in educating the community about CRC.
- We also learnt that team work is very important in supporting the objectives of CRC. One of the project schools had a very enthusiastic headteacher but with a

seemingly unmotivated staff. Despite the headteacher's tireless efforts, the children were not helped so much to appreciate the ideas about CRC from their teachers. Yet in Nkonya P/S, where everybody participated including the school children, the results were so amazing. Despite being relative poor, they did everything with joy.

- Although we were not able to work in more than four schools, at least we were satisfied that we made a mark somewhere. As the results have revealed, a number of children started getting lunch because of our effort. We propose that probably another batch continues with the issue of lunch not only to consolidate it but to extend it to many more schools.

Challenges:

Whereas headteachers and their teachers were very grateful for the imitative of involving them in the project, they also outlined a few problems that were not foreseen. These are:

- Serving meals can be time consuming and can lead to late start of afternoon classes
- The program is constrained the high cost of firewood which was not budgeted for in the first place.
- Parents contributions sometimes delay forcing headteachers to borrow, while at the same time unsure whether the money will be paid by the parents.
- Cost of maintaining a school cook was not planned for.

Achievements: Usually every improvement comes with a challenge. We hope that headteachers will solve those challenges as they move ahead. In addition, we are happy to report that headteachers and teachers mentioned that as the numbers of children taking lunch went up, they realized more concentration of pupils in afternoons, reduced absenteeism, increased activeness of pupils in and out of class, and the children seemed to be more interested in all school activities.

Way forward

1. We propose that another batch continues the same project to ensure continuity.
2. By involving commissioners like Muzilibi (Batch 13) some of the crucial aspects like lunch will be turned into policy, we hope.
3. The association of change agents in Uganda should be transformed into a registered organization soon. This will give us platform to cascade issues pertaining to children's rights more easily.

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PICTORIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SOME OF OUR EXPERINCES IN THE FIELD.



Figure 1. SCHOOL CHOIR USES MUSIC TO INFORM PARENTS ABOUT CRC



Figure 2. CHILDREN EMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR CRC



Figure 3. SMC CHAIRMAN CHECK ON THE PROGRESS OF THE PROJECT



Figure 4. MENTOR VISITS ONE OF THE PROJECT SCHOOL (SEATED AT THE BACK)