



Turning Challenges into Change:

How Social Audits are Improving School Feeding in Sissala East

By Alimata Abu and Wilhelmina Quaye

"School feeding has become a topical issue in the district. The awareness about the concept is high and is manifest in the way communities are willing to support school feeding."

—Godfred Baveru Kanton, Ghana Education Service

Background

SNV's 2012 baseline study of Sissala East District¹ revealed that traders, caterers, and farmer organisations lacked information about proposal requests for school feeding programmes. They were also not invited to district coordination meetings where this topic was discussed. The crops produced by local farmers were often overlooked by caterers, who had entrenched perceptions that the farmers lacked the capacity to produce and sell products that met their requirements. Parents and teachers were not aware of their own roles in the school feeding planning process, nor in their power to support providing nutritious and cost-effective meals to their local school systems.

SNV is an international non-profit development organization. Through our expertise in Agriculture, Renewable Energy and WASH, we use local solutions to tackle global challenges.

The Procurement Governance for Home Grown School Feeding (PG-HGSF) project is a 5-year programme funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented by SNV USA in Ghana, Kenya and Mali. In Ghana, PG-HGSF is implemented in 20 districts with the goal of involving 10,000 smallholder farmers in local school feeding programmes, including at least 30% women.

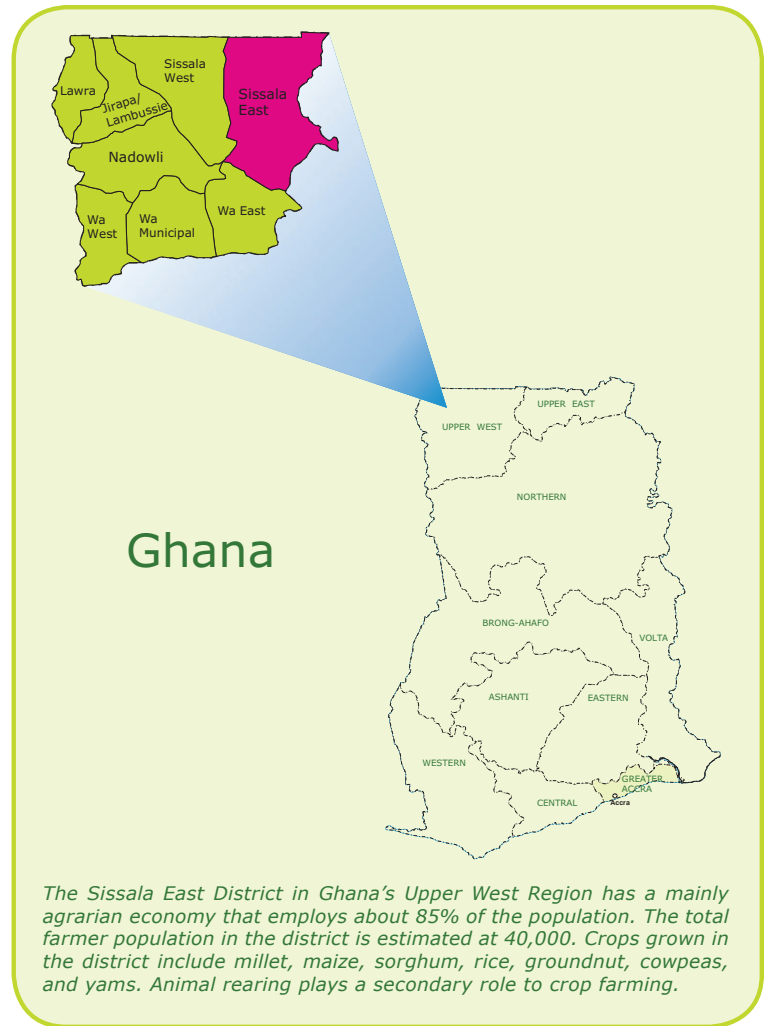
This document is part of a series of PG-HGSF learning cases that capture lessons from pilot interventions linking smallholder farmers to school feeding programmes. To find out more about PG-HGSF, contact Katherine Casey, Learning Manager, at kcasey@snvworld.org or visit www.snvworld.org/en/procurement-for-hgsf

With an estimated market size of US \$640,000² annually, the school feeding programme in Sissala East presents an interesting target for more inclusive procurement practices. To support greater smallholder farmer inclusion in this market, SNV introduced social audits³ in 2013 to draw attention to the potential links between smallholder farmers and school feeding programmes. The audits built the capacity of the local stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of the school feeding programme, to learn about expected expenditures at the community and district levels, and to understand the impact of the decision-making processes on the programme and on smallholder farmers in the community.

This case study reviews two social audits that SNV conducted in the Sissala East District. Based on SNV documents and interviews with stakeholders in the field, it examines the successes and challenges of the audits and describes how they can be applied as tools to promote social accountability and change.

Social Audits for School Feeding

SNV Ghana’s approach to social audits for school feeding includes organising sessions at the community and the district level. SNV initiates each audit at the community level by holding a service providers meeting. This forum brings together all stakeholders involved in providing school feeding services in Ghana—from caterers to district government representatives. Following this meeting, SNV convenes a community dialogue session for representatives from the community at which they rate their school feeding programme’s performance through a community scorecard activity. Through this activity, community members develop a tool for setting and assessing GSFP performance indicators. The audit process culminates in a district-level interface meeting where results from the community-level audit activities are presented to local government and civil society members. During this latter meeting, district representatives share data about school feeding at the community level and facilitators share the results from the scorecard activity. This district-level session concludes with the development of a reform agenda, which reflects deficiencies raised in prior sessions. Typically, no more than two communities participate in each audit to enable the effective implementation and moderation of the different audit activities.



- 1 SNV and Sustainable Aid through Voluntary Establishment—Ghana, *Report on Baseline Study of Procurement Governance for Home Grown School Feeding Programme* conducted in Sissala East District, 2012
- 2 Statistic provided by the Sissala East District Desk Officer Emmanuel Kudola at the district interface meeting in 5 March, 2014 in Tumu, Ghana.
- 3 A social audit is a participatory mechanism designed to increase stakeholder accountability by presenting and discussing programmatic and financial details in a public forum. In the case of social audits for school feeding programmes, the process was intended to increase community ownership of the programme, hold local decisionmakers accountable for their use of public fund, and to engage all actors responsible for segments of the school feeding programme in a discussion of programmatic challenges and ways to address them.



Preparing for the Audits

Prior to the first audit in Sissala East District, SNV organised a three-day training session in Tamale for the local partners that would join SNV in facilitating social audits in the three project regions.⁴ District Desk Officers (DDOs) attended the sessions and acted as liaisons between the national and district level stakeholders for school feeding. Since DDOs are responsible for documenting and reporting on the GSFP, their attendance in the training sessions prepared the officers to run effective social audits. SNV walked the partners and DDOs through facilitating the community and district-level meetings. Participants also received training in the community scorecard methodology.

The First Social Audit: Peing and Nankpawie

The first social audit was held for the Peing and Nankpawie communities in February 2013 and engaged over 110 people. The audit included the following activities:

(i) A service providers' meeting was held on 14 February 2013 and was attended by DIC members, the Sissala East District Assembly, representatives of the World Food Programme (WFP), the DDO, and some GSFP caterers. The meeting provided a forum for participants to discuss GSFP's roles and responsibilities as well as the programme's implementation, achievements, and challenges. This discussion was particularly important in these communities given that the responsibility for implementing the school feeding program is split between the WFP and GSFP.⁵ SNV used an input tracking matrix to plot comments and data from participants into a tabular format, which allowed participants to assess their individual and team performance against the criteria delineated in the GSFP District Operations Manual.

(ii) A community dialogue session was also held on 14 February 2013 for members of the SIC, representatives of Farmer-Based Organisations (FBOs), Area Council staff⁶, women's groups, pupils, teachers, and caterers. At the meeting, SNV provided participants with an overview of GSFP's objectives and the community discussed information from the service providers on GSFP's achievements and challenges. Transparency and accountability in procurement and GSFP management practices at the community and district level emerged as a recurring theme of the discussion. The session concluded with a community scorecard activity, during which participants identified indicators for assessing the performance of school feeding in their communities. The indicators selected for the community scorecard in Peing and Nankpawie

School Feeding Stakeholders in Ghana

The Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) has a mandate to feed one hot meal a day, prepared from locally-grown foodstuffs, to school children from kindergarten through grade six. The GSFP has three objectives: to reduce hunger and malnutrition; to increase school enrolment, attendance, and retention; and to boost the production of domestic food.

At the district level, the District Implementation Committee (DIC) coordinates the programme. This committee is composed of representatives of Ghana Health Services, Ghana Education Service, the District Assembly, and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. The DIC, through the District Assemblies, distributes and monitors school feeding payments from the GSFP national secretariat to the caterers. The District Assemblies issue cheques directly to caterers for their school feeding services. At the school level, there is a School Implementation Committee (SIC) composed of local community members and school executives. The SIC is responsible for supervising food preparation and serving activities, as well as ensuring that the school meets the GSFP objective for sourcing local foodstuffs.

4 SAVE Ghana facilitated audits with SNV in Sissala East District.

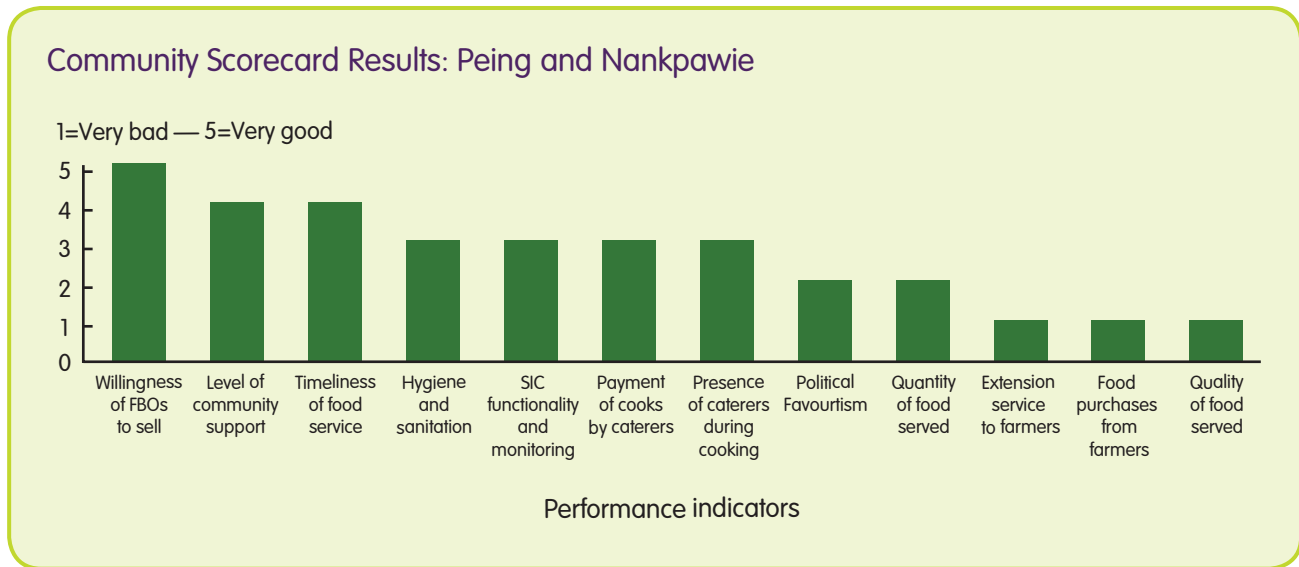
5 In Peing and Nankpawie, the WFP covers school feeding two days per week, while GSFP covers school feeding for the remaining three days per week.

6 The Area Council is a sub-structure of the District Assembly and serves as a link between communities to the Assembly. The council coordinates, monitors, and reports on the implementation of governance activities taking place within the communities under its jurisdiction.









reflected critical issues in the community, such as the quality and quantity of food served. All attendees independently assessed each of the scorecard indicators on a scale of one to five.

(iii) A *district interface meeting* was held on 15 February 2013 in Tumu, the district capital. A total of 50 people attended the meeting, including 20 participants from Peing and Nankpawie, service providers, and district assembly staff. The interface meeting provided the DDO with an opportunity to discuss the state of the GSFP in the district, to highlight achievements, to present the cash/funds flow for the year, and to present data on the GSFP market size.



SNV presented a summary of the community scorecard results from each community in English and the local language (Sissali). The indicators with the lowest scores in both communities included: political party favouritism within GSFP, food purchases from farmers in the communities, the quality and quantity of food served, and extension support to farmers.

To address indicators with low scores, participants collaborated on the development of a reform agenda, which outlined the following action items:

-  Sensitising all stakeholders to the school feeding concept, especially the roles and responsibilities of district and school implementation committees
-  Distributing the GSFP District Operations Manual to all actors
-  Checking World Food Program waybills⁷ of food supplies
-  Involving the SIC in recruiting caterers
-  Providing firewood
-  Signing contracts between caterers and the FBOs

At the conclusion of the social audit, representatives from the DIC, SIC, and the Peing and Nankpawie communities formed a seven-member team to monitor the implementation of the reform agenda.

6 The Area Council is a sub-structure of the District Assembly and serves as a link between communities to the Assembly. The council coordinates, monitors, and reports on the implementation of governance activities taking place within the communities under its jurisdiction.

7 For school feeding days covered by the World Food Program, food deliveries are accompanied by waybills. Waybills are documents that detail specifications about the delivery, including food type and total quantity supplied. These documents are presented to Ghana Education Service store keepers, who can use them to crosscheck deliveries before receiving food for storage, or further distribution to school caterers.



Post 2013 Audit: Taking Action on the Reform Agenda

Following the audit, participants took the following steps:

A series of weekly radio discussions ran for eight weeks, from July to August 2013, on RADFORD FM in Tumu. The series, funded by SNV, was designed to sensitise all stakeholders to the school feeding concept, especially the roles and responsibilities of the school and district implementation committees.

It also addressed the potential market opportunity that GSFP represents. The programme featured representatives from the Ghana Education Service, Ghana Health Service, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Sissala Rural Bank, DDOs, and SAVE-Ghana. The weekly programme also served as an interactive forum for sharing ideas, and featured a call-in line for listeners to ask questions, make suggestions, or contribute feedback.

The reform agenda monitoring team held *quarterly monitoring and feedback sessions* to check on the progress of the 2013 reform agenda and to prompt responsible parties to take action. During one session, stakeholders learned that the Ghana Education Service had introduced new school feeding log books to document the outcomes of their field visits for quarterly reporting purposes. The Ghana Health Services also reported on their periodic monitoring to ascertain environmental, personal, and food hygiene practices. At another session, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture reported on their farmer education programmes on market access and their facilitation of linkages between the farmers and the caterers.

Additional actions were initiated by other stakeholders as follows: 1) SNV disseminated the GSFP District Operations Manual to stakeholders; 2) head teachers organised quarterly meetings with SIC members; 3) the DDO partnered with the DIC and SNV to organise quarterly information sessions to enhance transparency and accountability in procurement governance; 4) SICs started checking the waybills that accompany WFP deliveries to the schools; and 5) the community mothers club conducted inspections on cooking at the schools.

“The radio discussions heightened awareness and support for the GSFP and reduced conflicts between caterers and other key stakeholders. The radio programme also helped to bring us together as a team of DIC members, to reduce duplication of efforts, and to enhance transparency and accountability”.

Emmanuel Kudola, DDO Sissala East



Presentation of community score card results



Impact of the 2013 Social Audit

As a result of the 2013 audit, most caterers now have more binding contracts to ensure purchases from local farmers and to improve the timeliness and quality of food served to school pupils. Caterers have strengthened their organisational capacity by forming a district-wide association, which keeps records of local foodstuff purchases. To enable caterers to more readily source their ingredients from smallholder farmers, the District Assembly initiated a Sissala Rural Bank loan program. The programme, which is guaranteed by the Assembly, extends credit to caterers to purchase foodstuffs from farmers in their communities at a reduced interest rate (20%⁸). As of 2014, 14 caterers are participating in the loan program.

Collaboration among actors has become more effective and there are now good working relationships at all levels of GSFP management. The community's contribution to the school feeding programmes has also improved and community members are providing water and firewood in addition to assisting with the rehabilitation of school kitchens. The Nankpawie community, in particular, has shown tremendous support for rehabilitating their kitchen.

The Second Social Audit: Nabulo and Wuru

After the first social audit, the DIC and key implementers of the 2013 reform agenda met to review the progress made. Convinced by the positive outcomes of the first audit, the District Assembly decided to conduct a second social audit for two additional communities in the District: Nabulo and Wuru. The partners agreed to extend the process to three days and to invite representatives from political parties and rural banks. The second social audit was held for the Nabulo and Waru communities in March 2014, involved 196 participants, and included the following meetings:

i) *The service providers' meeting* on 3 March 2014 was attended by DIC members, executive caterers from the Sissala East District Caterers Association, representatives of leading political parties, some non-profit organisations working in agriculture development, financial institutions (including the Sissala Rural Bank), and FBOs. The meeting was designed to review the implementation of the 2013 reform agenda. Participants discussed the achievements and challenges to date, which were plotted on an input tracking matrix. Achievements included quarterly DIC meetings; the eight-part radio series; ongoing trainings; the better cross-checking of food supplies; and good collaboration between GSFP actors. Challenges included the use of children to support the cooking process in some communities and political favouritism by some service providers. Some SICs were still not functioning properly and delays in payments for caterers affected the quality and quantity of food served, not to mention the ability of the caterers to source from smallholder farmers.

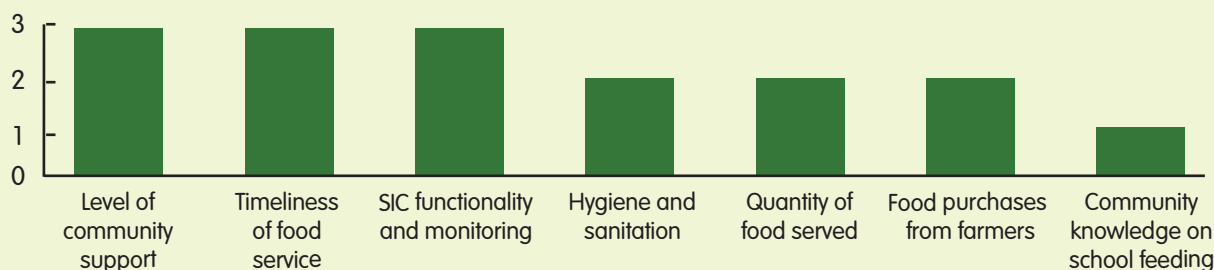


Community members planning the reform agenda

8 The standard rate for loans is 28%.

Community Scorecard Results: Waru and Nabulo (lowest scoring performance indicators)

1=Very bad — 3=Fair










(ii) A community dialogue session was held on the 4 March 2014. Facilitators used the data collected via the input tracking matrix to lead a discussion on the implementation of GSFP, its objectives, achievements, and the role of the participants. Through a community scorecard activity, participants scored the performance of indicators used in the 2013 audit to identify what changed over the past year.

(iii) A district interface meeting was held on 5 March, 2014 in Tumu. A total of 53 people participated, including ten participants each from the Wuru and Nabulo communities and five participants each from the Peing and Nankpawie communities. The session reviewed the results from the 2013 audit and, as with that audit, included a presentation by the DDO on GSFP achievements and the cash/funds flow for the year. Facilitators presented the results of the scorecard activity, which were translated into the two local languages (Sissali and Kassem). Performance indicators in need of improvement included: the ability for caterers to purchase foodstuffs from the community; delays in payment from the central government; discrepancies between enrolment figures and the figures used to pay caterers; the quantity of food served to school pupils; and the level of community participation/support in school feeding programme implementation. Based on these issues, participants outlined the following items for the 2014 action plan:

“The Social Audit process has really strengthened stakeholder involvement in the management and procurement governance of the School Feeding programme. Awareness among farmers to access the school feeding programme market has heightened.”

Emmanuel Kudola, DDO Sissala East

-  Forming a SIC in Wuru
-  Formalising caterer contracts
-  Replacing some cooks
-  Fostering greater FBO-school feeding programme linkages
-  Creating more awareness of the GSFP through radio programmes
-  Setting regular meetings for the DIC
-  Forming monitoring teams

Impact of the 2014 Social Audit

Preliminary efforts are already underway to address issues identified during the second social audit. As one accomplishment, the DIC incorporated the construction of 16 school kitchens into its medium-term development plan. Challenges, however, remain. Despite increasing enrolments and the rising costs of produce



and services, for example, the amount of food given to each child remains the same and, thus, the quantity of food is often too little. Political party favouritism within the school feeding programme also remains a persistent challenge. As the district considers expanding the social audit process to other communities in 2015, strengthening the SIC and involving school pupils are potential areas for further consideration.

Lessons Learned

Implementing social audits in Sissala East revealed several factors that can inform the social audit processes conducted in other communities in Ghana, or internationally:

1. Objective facilitators mitigate conflict at both the community level and district level. At the community level, facilitators moderate the development and scoring of performance indicators. At the district interface meetings, facilitators make sure that the process is inclusive and participatory.
2. Effective implementation and monitoring of the reform agenda require the commitment of all relevant stakeholders. A dedicated budget for the reform agenda improves the likelihood of change. In Sissala East, the District Assembly already has plans to commit resources to continue social audits when SNV's PG-HGSF project exits the district.
3. Given the workload of institutional heads at the district level, monitoring activities are more likely to take place when the task is delegated to a non-executive representative of the DIC.
4. Providing adequate time for the social audit meetings is critical for robust, yet efficient, discussions.

Conclusions

The two social audits in the Sissala East District have been successful in creating community awareness, transparency, and enhanced accountability. The audits improved the exchange of information at all levels in the procurement and governance system of the school feeding programme. Despite challenges that remain, the audits empowered communities to own their school feeding programmes and increased stakeholder's financial and social accountability.

