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A study into the delivery of the School Nutrition Programme (SNP) in selected schools and districts in the Eastern Cape

Occasional Paper

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- the district SNP coordinators from the five districts visited by the PSAM;
- Service Providers/Suppliers;
- SNP School Coordinators (Educators) at the eight schools visited;
- And most importantly, the meal servers and learners whose hopes for better services in the SNP were renewed by the PSAM's visit to the schools.

INTRODUCTION

The School Nutrition Programme (SNP) research project evaluated the roll-out of school nutrition in the current school year (2007). The research also sought to establish whether the current SNP model being implemented has resulted in an improvement on the previous model (which involved local communities and co-operatives) which had been suspended amidst allegations of widespread fraud and corruption. .

STUDY METHOD

The PSAM randomly selected and then visited eight schools situated in five districts of the Eastern Cape. The districts visited were: Ngcobo, Mthatha, Libode, Cofimvaba and Lady Frere. Suppliers and district coordinators in these five districts were also contacted. A standard questionnaire was developed to ensure uniformity in the responses. Data were collected through school visits during August 2007. SNP school coordinators (educators), learners and meal servers participated in the study by completing the questionnaire with the assistance of the PSAM staff conducting the study. A meeting was also held with the assistant director for SNP at head office.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study sample is not representative of total number of schools that benefit from the SNP in the Eastern Cape and thus the results do not mean that progress or problems that were identified in the schools visited represent problems or progress in all Eastern Cape schools. However, the problems experienced by the schools visited by the PSAM may very well be found at other schools in the Eastern Cape. The study is based on responses received from the district coordinators, educators, meal servers, learners and suppliers as well as from a meeting held with the assistant director for the SNP in the province. Not all suppliers took part in the study and the absence of their input may limit the analysis to a limited degree.

BACKGROUND TO THE SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMME

The School Nutrition Programme was introduced as a Presidential Lead Project in 1994, and was administered by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) Office.¹ It was later transferred to the Department of Health after the RDP office closed in 1996. In 2004, the Department of Education assumed responsibility for the programme.

The School Nutrition Programme (previously known as the Primary School Nutrition Scheme or Programme) was conceived as an intervention whose aim was to:

contribute to the improvement of education quality by enhancing primary pupils' learning capacity, school attendance and punctuality and contribute to general health development by alleviating poverty.

¹ Wildeman, R., and Mbebetho, N., 2005 *Reviewing Ten Years of the School Nutrition Programme: The Institute for Democracy in South Africa*, Budget Information Service Occasional Papers, p.2.

Educating pupils on nutrition and also improving nutritional status through micro-nutrition supplementation.²

The Provincial Health Departments were originally responsible for the provision of food at schools which qualified under the School Nutrition Programme. However, in 2003 the Health Department revealed that the programme would be administered in partnership with the Education Department, and would be transferred to the Education Department in 2004.³ This decision emanated from a Cabinet decision which explained that the transfer was due to:

- *The fact that school feeding is being implemented in schools, which is the functional responsibility of Education*
- *The programme forms part of the education outcomes*
- *Nutrition needs to be included into the broader context of education development.⁴*

An interdepartmental working group was established to develop an exit-entry strategy for the transfer of the programme from the Eastern Cape Health Department to the Education Department.⁵ This was aimed at ensuring a smooth transfer of the programme in 2004.

The key responsibility of the Department of Education since taking over from the Department of Health has been to plan and manage the conditional grant which funds this programme, support and monitor implementation at provincial level and carry out statutory reporting.⁶ The National Department of Education's planning therefore had to identify problems with the nutrition programme and incorporate in its plans measures to address these problems.⁷

In January 2005, it was reported in the media that Eastern Cape MEC for Education, Mkhangeleni Matomela, had suggested that suppliers and department officials could not manage the programme and that the Department would have to transfer it to communities to manage it.⁸ The use of non-governmental organisations in the programme, however, had already been explored when the programme was under the Department of Health, which showed that the problems were not just about the failure of suppliers to deliver but also how it was administered by the provincial Department. In March 2005, it was reported that a total of 122 schools were not on the programme due to the Education Department's failure to allocate suppliers to distribute food to these

² White Paper on Reconstruction and Development, 1994

http://www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/white_papers/rdpwhite.html?rebookmark=1#PROJECTS
accessed on 20 September 2006.

³ "Two depts to run feeding", *Daily Dispatch*, 10 December 2002, "Education dept to run school nutrition", *Daily Dispatch*, 22 February, 2003.

⁴ Kloka, D (2003) cited in Wildeman, R, and Mbebetho, N. 2005 Reviewing Ten Years of the School Nutrition Programme, IDASA, p.18.

⁵ Eastern Cape Department of Education, School Nutrition Programme, Business Plan, 2004/05, p. 12.

⁶ Kallman, K. 2005 Food for Thought: A Review of the National School Nutrition Programme, University of Cape Town, p. 14.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Communities might run food schemes", *Daily Dispatch*, 21 January 2005.

schools.⁹ It was also highlighted that problems between suppliers and manufacturers added to the non-delivery of food to school children.¹⁰ It was further reported that despite a damning report in 2004, revealing that rotten food had been delivered to some schools, the Department had renewed all contracts with suppliers.¹¹

In its presentation at the September 2005 MTEC¹² hearings, the Department reported that payment backlogs of approximately R40 million from the 2004/05 financial year were funded from the 2005/06 budget.¹³ This meant that approximately 20 percent of the 2005/06 budget allocated for school feeding in that year was spent on previous financial year's commitments resulting in a reduction of funds available for utilisation in the 2005/06 financial year.

At the MTEC hearings the Education Department explained that preparations were underway for the roll-out of a new SNP model in the 2006/07 financial year. This model was supposed to draw upon the services of local co-operatives. The Department explained that it had had "a series of meetings with the departments of Agriculture, Social Development, Health, the Office of the Premier, local municipalities... to ensure an integrated approach to the implementation of the SNP programme that will eventually contribute to local economic development".¹⁴

THE COOPERATIVE SNP MODEL

The model was conceived through a vision concurrent with the Provincial Growth and Development Plan framework whereby all provincial departments allocate public resources in a manner that benefits communities.¹⁵ According to the Department, this model sought to award contracts to local co-operatives and community based organisations which would be responsible for carrying out feeding at schools.¹⁶ These co-operatives, which were also known as secondary cooperatives, were then required to have contracts with primary cooperatives which were responsible for serving food to learners.¹⁷ Under this model the Department would enter into a service level agreement with the secondary co-operative and as part of its service agreement with the Department. The secondary cooperative had to sign another contract with a primary co-operative.¹⁸ The Department would pay the primary cooperatives via the secondary cooperatives.¹⁹

⁹ "122 schools not on feeding programme", *Daily Dispatch*, 1 March 2005.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "Dept fails to act on rotten school food", *Daily Dispatch*, 5 April 2005.

¹² The Medium Term Expenditure Committees (MTEC) are technical committees responsible for evaluating the Medium Term Expenditure Framework budget submissions of national and provincial departments.

¹³ Eastern Cape Department of Education Presentation, MTEC Hearings, 13-15 September 2005.

¹⁴ Eastern Cape Department of Education Presentation, MTEC Hearings, 13-15 September 2005, p. 10

¹⁵ Porteus, K. 2005 Local Economic Development and Educational Provisioning... A New Pathway (working draft for the Eastern Cape Department of Education).

¹⁶ Eastern Cape Department of Education, School Nutrition Programme, Business Plan, 2006/07, p. 3.

¹⁷ Eastern Cape Department of Education's response to the Daily Dispatch article on 01 June 2006, p. 1

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Department envisaged that the co-operative model would promote “efficiency and self-sufficiency of all resourcing programmes so that the resources can be extended to other areas while at the same time building the capacity of the schools to become self sufficient.”²⁰

The SNP was supposed to feed 928 865 learners situated throughout the 23 districts of the province in the 2006 school year. As shown in the Table 2 below, the cooperative model was piloted in 6 of these 23 districts and was supposed to target 356 495 learners. This represented 38 percent of all learners who were supposed to benefit from the programme during the 2006 school year.²¹ This meant that the pilot of the cooperative model occurred in some of the most densely populated school districts in the province. Out of a total of 5046 schools benefiting from the SNP programme, 2254 schools (or 44.67 percent) were in the districts involved in piloting the cooperative model. It appears that the cooperative model should rather have been piloted on a smaller scale, as it required significant support and infrastructure. This should have been planned for well in advance. From its own reports, the Department was not in a clear state of readiness when the cooperative model was piloted. According to the Department’s first quarter reports for 2006/07, the Department was still trying to get equipment for the cooked menu.²² The Department further noted that pot suppliers had been identified and delivery would only commence in July 2006.²³ By June 2006, there were still schools for which no supplier had been allocated.²⁴

Table 2. Six districts in which the cooperative model was piloted.²⁵

NAME OF DISTRICT	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	CO-OPERATIVE	NUMBER OF LEARNERS
Bizana	226	Ikubantu	58 039
Butterworth	413	Yizani Sakhe Ma Africa	50 603
East London	340	ICD	22 470
		Inqaba Yesizwe	21 324
King Williams Town	489	Mzoxolo coalition	42 506
Libode	425	Iziqhamo Zenkululeko	90 791
Mthatha	361	KSD	70 762
TOTAL	2254		356 495

²⁰ Eastern Cape Department of Education, Engagement of Co-operatives-SNP, 08 March 2006, p.3.

²¹ Department of Education, School Nutrition Programme, Quarterly Report, April-June 2006, p. 2

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Eastern Cape Department of Education’s response to the Daily Dispatch article on 01 June 2006, p. 2

Soon after the cooperative model was introduced, reports in the media indicated that there were major problems with its effective roll out.²⁶ While defending its roll out, which commenced in May 2006, the Education Department acknowledged that there were problems with the cooperative model. The Department admitted that there was lack of cooperation between suppliers and cooperatives and that some cooperatives lacked the capacity to ensure an effective roll out of the plan.²⁷ When justifying the continuation of the cooperative model, the Acting Superintendent-General for the Department, Professor Harry Nengwenkhulu, was quoted in the press as saying “Teething problems were not surprising considering that a number of the co-operative service providers that have been brought on board were new to the field and may not be adept at dealing with all the intricacies involved in setting up the necessary infrastructure”.²⁸ Matters appeared to come to a head when Dr Trudy Thomas (an ex-MEC for the Health Department) wrote a hard hitting opinion piece for the Daily Dispatch on 19 June 2006 in which she claimed *inter alia* that:

There was also undue interest by politicians and civic leaders who called endless meetings – very puzzling until their links with the business side of the feeding scheme began to emerge. Now the state is formally dignifying this hijacking of the R234 million-a-year nutrition programme from the children for the benefit of business and communities...

Children, despite the first class citizenship granted to them by our Constitution, are dependant on adults to defend the rights and entitlements this gives them. But adults have instead exploited and ripped them off throughout the checkered history of the PSNP. They have consistently grabbed centre stage and asserted a primary claim on the nutrition millions to boost their interests and relegated feeding of the children to secondary or even optional status. They have repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to let children go hungry while they fight their self-interest battles...²⁹

On 23 June 2006 the Eastern Cape Premier became publicly involved and announced the appointment of an inquiry into the SNP and commended Dr Trudy Thomas for her “spot on comments” in the Daily Dispatch.³⁰ The inquiry was to become known as the “SNP Review Task Team”, and it released an edited report of its findings on 12 July 2006 which highlighted a number of problems with the newly introduced co-operative model which included: Discrepancies in the tendering process as “some suppliers were awarded tenders even though they had submitted their applications after the deadline”; that “children could have been receiving non-quality food as there was no food nutritionists to do quality checks”; that “co-operatives were introduced prematurely as some did not receive proper training” and “suppliers received their award letters three days before the day they were expected to deliver food at school”.³¹

²⁶ “ Kids go hungry as food scheme collapses”, *Daily Dispatch*, 01 June 2006.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ “We’ll overcome feeding snags”, *Daily Dispatch*, 02 June 2006.

²⁹ “Infighting and backstabbing”, *Daily Dispatch*, 19 June 2006

³⁰ “you liars”, *Daily Dispatch*, 24 June 2006

³¹ “School food probe reveals problems”, *Daily Dispatch*, 13 July 2006

The Review Task Team's edited report also indicated that:

- "There is no contracts management system" and that it was "therefore difficult to manage service levels and terms of the contracts";
- "There was a clear state of unreadiness by the DoE at the time of implementation of the cooperatives pilot and the SMMEs";
- "There is potential inflations of enrolment figures by school principals to increase the budget allocation of their schools. The SNP unit places reliance on SNP coordinators to assist in verifying and monitoring these figures for the purpose of ensuring adequate budget provision. However, due to the vast workloads that the coordinators have, with some having as many as 170 schools to oversee, the effective control and monitoring capacity is compromised";
- "Mechanisms will have to be developed on how the service providers will be paid for those days taking into account the under performance";
- "A situation where bakkie loads of boxes of invoices are delivered to Head Office for processing is not sustainable and exposes the system to fraud and human errors";
- "The model of cooperatives was not formulated sufficiently before implementation and this has resulted in a service delivery problems";
- "The Department did not undertake sufficient due diligence and did not put policies, processes, monitoring and reporting mechanisms in place to deal with the cooperatives."³²

These revelations were supported by the Education Department's SNP Quarterly Report for the period April to June 2006, which noted that new suppliers were not feeding regularly; there was a lack of human resource capacity at district level; there were allegations of poor foodstuffs in some districts; and there were non performing SNP district coordinators.³³ Numerous media reports on non-feeding in some areas of the province and poor quality foodstuffs delivered by suppliers shed further light on the dismal state of affairs.³⁴

The Premier's initial inquiry recommended that an independent forensic auditing firm be appointed to conduct a forensic investigation into alleged irregularities in the programme. The edited report of the forensic investigation was released in December 2006 and found, amongst other things, widespread corruption and irregularities within the programme. The investigation also revealed:

- The Education Department had awarded contracts irregularly to SMME and Secondary Co-operatives;
- Overpayments were made to suppliers;
- Payments were approved and made to non-existent suppliers;
- Departmental officials had interests in the SMMEs and co-operatives;

³² Critique of the Performance of the Department of Education, Service Providers, SMMEs, Secondary and Primary Cooperatives with regard to SNP 12 July 2006.

³³ Eastern Cape Department of Education, School Nutrition Programme, Quarterly Report, April-June 2006

³⁴ "Co-ops dump bread 'mountain", *Daily Dispatch*, 18 July 2006, "Baker claims 'unfit' bread was sabotaged", *Daily Dispatch*, 20 July 2006, " Kids go hungry as food scheme collapses", *Daily Dispatch*, 01 June 2006.

- Certain primary co-operatives were employees and not members of primary co-operatives affiliated to the Secondary co-operatives;
- Non-delivery of food to schools was "experienced on a very large scale";
- Huge backlog of payments.³⁵

The report also echoed concerns raised by the PSAM earlier in 2006 regarding the shocking deficiencies in the administration and monitoring of the SNP.³⁶

The forensic report recommended that corrective steps be taken to prevent further fruitless and wasteful expenditure by the Department, including that all SMME and secondary cooperatives participating in the SNP should be summarily suspended from participation in the programme and that all payments in respect of the SNP must be immediately stopped pending the outcome of an ensuing investigation. In addition, secondary co-operatives and suppliers who "displayed anomalies in the vetting process" should be excluded from future invitations to supply food.³⁷ The report also recommended that the Accounting Officer for the Department of Education "must assume functional authority of the SNP" and that the "financial management of the SNP must be placed under the delegation of the accounting officer". Steps also needed to be taken to suspend officials "suspected of being involved in irregularities in respect of the SNP" and that "disciplinary action should be instituted against all officials of the Department of Education who have interests in suppliers to the SNP" The report also recommended that "steps should be taken to institute a recovery process of overpayments and payments to suppliers that were appointed irregularly or paid irregularly."³⁸

The forensic audit report recommended that a disciplinary enquiry be convened within 30 days and that a procurement process should be convened to appoint new suppliers for SNP with the latter being facilitated and assured by the Provincial Treasury and monitored by the Office of the Premier.³⁹

THE INTERIM SIX MONTHS ARRANGEMENT for 2007

The Education Department released a press statement on 30 January 2007, to provide a progress report on steps it had taken to ensure a smooth resumption of the SNP in the 2007 academic year. It stated that the provincial task team, set up to restructure and revamp the programme to address all its chronic weaknesses, had agreed on an "interim six months arrangement that would guarantee that learners would at least receive basic sustenance in the form of bread or fortified biscuits with butter and jam, taken with a nutritious drink."⁴⁰ The Department then applied for an emergency 48 hour tender from

³⁵ Summary report of independent forensic auditors entitled "Alleged procurement fraud and irregularities in respect of the school nutrition programme: Department of Education", 21 December 2006.

³⁶ PSAM Press statement: PSAM will seek in-depth information on the School Nutrition Programme, 17 July 2006; The PSAM condemns the Education Department's poor management of the School Nutrition Programme, 4 June 2006.

³⁷ Summary report of independent forensic auditors entitled "Alleged procurement fraud and irregularities in respect of the school nutrition programme: Department of Education" 21 December 2006.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Eastern Cape Department of Education, Media statement, 30 January 2007

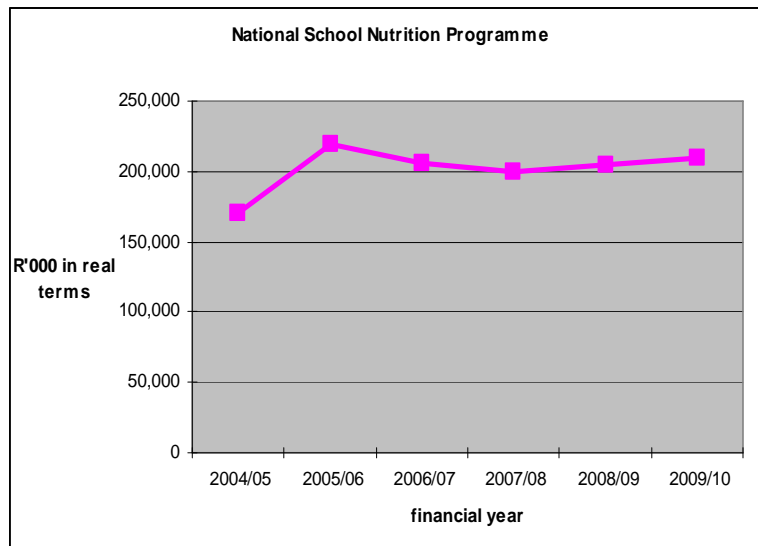
the Provincial Treasury.⁴¹ All service providers that were selected to render services in the SNP were asked to undertake an assessment of their state of readiness and inform the Department by 31 January 2007.⁴²

SNP BUDGET ALLOCATIONS FOR 2007/08

The (SNP) conditional grant increased from R234.99 million in 2006/07 to R237.89 in 2007/08.⁴³ This equated to an increase of 1.71 percent in nominal terms, but, in real terms, actually represents negative growth of 3.22 percent. The Department's budget split between feeding and non-feeding in the current financial year is 93.5 and 6.5 percent respectively.⁴⁴

Over the entire 2007/08-2009/10 MTEF period, this conditional grant is set to grow by 0.56 percent in real terms. This increase may not be enough to ensure that learners are fed for five days a week throughout the school year. The increase in funding reflected in Graph 1 below for the 2005/06 financial year included a rollover of un-spent funds from the 2004/05 financial year. For the year under review (2007/08), the allocation for SNP will decline by 3.22 percent in real terms. When inflation is taken into account this means that the Department has less money to spend on school feeding in this financial year than it had in 2006/07. According to the Education Department's 2007/08 business plan there were 4978 schools set to benefit from the SNP.⁴⁵

Graph 1. Budget Trends for the SNP



⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid. in the media statement, the Department gave its assurance that feeding would start by 5 February 2007, but as it will be indicated later in this report, some schools had to wait until 12 February for SNP. ,

⁴³ In his 2007/08 policy speech, the MEC for Education reported that the conditional grant for SNP would be R245, 576 million in the present year. This figure is different from the one presented in the Provincial Budget Statement and the Annual Performance Plan for 2007/08.

⁴⁴ Eastern Cape Department of Education, Progress Report on School Nutrition Programme. 09 May 2007. Bhisho.

⁴⁵ Eastern Cape Department of Education, School Nutrition Programme, Business Plan, 2007/08, pp 15-16.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The PSAM visited eight schools in five districts. These eight schools have a combined total of 3335 learners who should be benefiting from the School Nutrition Programme. When the PSAM visited the schools, only two out of the eight visited had had food delivered on time. In terms of the Department's service level agreements with suppliers, food has to be delivered to schools before 8 o'clock in the morning to allow for learners to receive their food between 8 o'clock and 10 o'clock in the morning.

According to three schools' records there were 70 planned feeding days between February and May 2007.⁴⁶ These school records indicated that, food (primarily bread) was delivered to schools although the deliveries were at times late. Late deliveries included both delays in the timely delivery of food (so as to ensure that feeding took place before midday of each school day) and backdated deliveries (where food was not delivered on the day, but arrived with the following days' delivery).

There appeared to be serious problems with the delivery of foodstuffs (jam, margarine and the nutritional drink) with only one school's records showing some level of consistency in the delivery of these foodstuffs.⁴⁷

According to another school co-ordinator and her records, bread was only delivered once or twice a week, while the delivery of the other foodstuffs was spread erratically across various days of the month.⁴⁸ Another school's records revealed that the supplier had failed to deliver the nutritional drink for the months of February and April without any justification for this failure while another school's delivery records revealed that only half of the delivery days were met with no backdated deliveries occurring. Such dismal performance by the supplier's in question has clearly impacted upon the learners who should be benefiting from the SNP.

1, SNP Coordinators (Educators)

All the school coordinators at the eight schools visited took part in the study.

1.1 Experiences of SNP prior, during and post the cooperative model

Pre-cooperative Model

When asked to explain their experiences of the SNP before the introduction of the 2006 co-operative model, four of the eight school coordinators gave no answer due to the fact that they were not involved in the programme at the time. Three indicated that things

⁴⁶ Other schools' recorded less numbers of feeding days. According the 2006/07 and the 2007/08 business plans, there were 69 planned feeding days between February and May 2007. Any less deliveries indicate material breaches of the service level agreement.

⁴⁷ According one of the suppliers, other 'commodities', like jam, margarine and the nutritional drink only had to be delivered once a week, while bread had to be delivered everyday. This means therefore, that three deliveries a month would be in line with the suppliers' obligations.

⁴⁸ Only 45 of the 70 feeding days were met at this school. In addition no jam, margarine or juice was delivered in May as the supplier had indicated that the April delivery would cover both months.

went well before the introduction of the cooperative model. One school coordinator said bread was “always delivered late and the supplier would deliver once for three days”.

The cooperative model

Five school coordinators who had indicated that they were part of the pilot model said there were problems with it. Other participants whose schools were not part of the pilot gave responses on the quality of food as the cooked menu was implemented in all the districts. Only seven of the eight participants responded to the question. Problems with the cooperative model ranged from the poor quality of the food, absence of cooking utensils, and learners not wanting to eat the food. Erratic delivery of foodstuffs was also reported as being a problem with the cooperative model. One school coordinator said: “it did not work, sometimes the soup would not come and it was sometimes also rotten and not good for the learners.” This was also confirmed by another school coordinator who indicated that deliveries did not occur regularly and that the food was not always fresh and clean.

Four school coordinators expressed unhappiness with the quality of the delivered food, saying that learners did not want to eat it. Of these four, one reported that “problems with the soup were that it had no expiry dates, we had learners vomiting more than once.” Another school coordinator said her school had problems with stoves which arrived late. Prior to the delivery of these stoves, meal servers had had to gather wood to make fires in order to prepare the food.

Post cooperative model

Half of the school coordinators indicated that the suspension of the 2006 cooperative model had not improved the situation, with two of them saying that the situation had deteriorated, while the other four said the situation had since improved. One of the school coordinators who expressed dissatisfaction with the current SNP said irregularities still persisted as deliveries were often late and would only be done once or twice a week. The school coordinators who said there had been some improvement in the programme reported that despite these improvements, late deliveries and erratic delivery of other foodstuffs still persisted.

Six of the school coordinators mentioned that non-feeding resulted in a drop in numbers as learners would not come to school. What is interesting to note is that, in the area where there was easy road access, respondents said that there were less instances of non-delivery of food. Three of the eight school coordinators also revealed that SNP was very important to the learners as they depended on SNP as their only meal for the day.

1.2 Frequency in the delivery of food

When asked to comment on the frequency of the delivery of food, three of the eight school coordinators gave an “average” score, while another three indicated that it was very poor. Two school coordinators gave “good” and “excellent” scores respectively.

Whilst it is clear from the majority of responses given by the school coordinators that delivery of food by the suppliers was average or below par, seven of the school coordinators indicated that when food was delivered it was of acceptable quality. Responses in this regard ranged between “good” and “excellent”, particularly in so far as

bread was concerned. One school coordinator said that the quality of food delivered was very poor.

Three school coordinators indicated that bread was delivered daily with the rest saying that sometimes it was delivered only twice for the whole week and sometimes not delivered at all. This (as the PSAM found during the visits) affected feeding times at these schools as feeding had to take place later than the scheduled time. This also disrupted teaching and learning. Only three of the school coordinators said they had managed to adhere to the feeding times stipulated in the service level agreement's entered into between the Department and suppliers.⁴⁹ Four said that feeding normally took place between 11am and 1pm. One school coordinator said feeding was dependant on the time of the arrival of food.

1.3 Support from the Department

There were mixed responses when grading the Department's support to the schools. Four of the eight school coordinators graded the Department between "good" and "excellent" on their availability when schools need them, while the other four indicated that it was "poor".

Four of the eight school coordinators gave an "average" score on the effectiveness of the Department in monitoring the SNP. Two graded this service as "poor" and "very poor", with only one school coordinator indicating that the Department's monitoring was "excellent". The eighth school coordinator did not give any score on this scale.

Responses from five school coordinators on the frequency of visits by the Department to the schools ranged from "very poor" to "average". Two school coordinators said that no district officials had visited the schools since the beginning of the year. One school coordinator said that she often had to visit the district office.

On their perceptions of the impact of SNP on learner performance, all the school coordinators indicated that performance and attendance had improved as a result of SNP. When asked how the SNP could be improved, there was a general view that timeous delivery of food could improve the programme. Certain school coordinators also felt that feeding should be extended to include learners in the upper grades at the schools.⁵⁰ School coordinators also indicated that the Department should at least monitor the SNP monthly, as foodstuffs had not been delivered regularly. This was especially important as, according to one of the school coordinators, "many of the learners' parents are not working and cannot take care of their children's health." One of the school coordinators said that schools needed to be contacted when food was not going to be delivered.

⁴⁹ According to the service level agreement signed between the Department and the supplier, foodstuffs must be delivered before 8 am weekdays to allow for meals to be served between 8 am and 10 am.

⁵⁰ According to school coordinators, learners in Grade 8 and 9 were excluded from feeding. Two school coordinators also reported that while the Department had informed that the number of learners meant to benefit from SNP had increased from July 2007; the quantity of foodstuff delivered by the suppliers had not increased.

2. Meal Servers

2.1 Food Delivery

The PSAM interviewed nine meal servers who worked in five of the eight schools visited. The school coordinators explained that the meals servers' absence in the other three schools, during the PSAM's visit was due to late, erratic or non-delivery of food by the suppliers. The meal servers had different lengths of experience in working with the SNP. One of the meal servers said she had been working as a meal server since 1994. Four indicated that they had four years experience each. Two of the meals servers said they had been working with the SNP for three years each, with only two indicating that had started in 2006.

The meal servers reported that they would sometimes wait until the afternoon for the food to be delivered. At the schools where meal servers were not present during the PSAM visit, it was reported that they would only come when the delivery vehicle had arrived at the school. One of the school coordinators said, "If the delivery vehicle fails to arrive on any particular day, they don't come to the school at all."

Certain contradictions were highlighted in the responses of meal servers when asked about the frequency of deliveries since the resumption of the SNP in February 2007. At four schools, meal servers indicated that deliveries were frequent. This was, however, in contrast with their follow up responses, when asked about how often non-delivery had occurred, there were various indications that this occurred "more than once a week" to "once a month". Meal servers at the fifth school indicated that non-delivery occurred frequently.

Meal servers from three of the five schools (who had meal servers present when the PSAM conducted site visits) indicated that when bread was delivered it was always fresh, while meals servers at the remaining two schools explained that it was sometimes stale.

2.2 Non-Payment of meal servers

When asked how the SNP could be improved, meal servers explained that they had not been paid and that this non-payment was very stressful and demotivating. One meal server explained that:

When there is feeding, it takes place well in our school. We come here everyday to feed the learners and more learners attend school because of SNP. But we have not been paid since we started in February 2007. In 2006 we only got paid in December. Even our banks accounts have been closed because they are inactive.

Those who were present during the PSAM visit said they only came because they felt the need to come for the sake of learners. One of them said "we feel like we would be letting the kids down if we didn't come. Despite not being paid we feel that these are our own kids and we should come and feed them." One of the respondents added that SNP should be extended to grades 8 and 9. Two reasons were given for this. Firstly, older learners in the above mentioned grades took the food from the young ones. Secondly

there were poor learners in grade 8 and 9 who should be eligible for SNP. One meal server suggested that SNP could improve if food was delivered everyday and early.

3. Learners

There were 13 learners who took part in the study and they were aged between 8 and 16. Only two of the learners indicated that they got food everyday, with the rest saying that they only got food when it had been delivered, as it sometimes did not get delivered.

On the issue of non-delivery, three of the learners said they sometimes did not get fed for at least two days. 11 of the learners said that non-feeding affected their attention span. This also emerged from the school coordinators, who said some of these learners, in particular those in the lower grades, would leave class and queue outside the room where feeding usually takes place.

Most of the learners in the schools expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the bread, saying that it was sometimes stale. Only two of those who took part in this study said that the bread was always fresh. However, there was a strong view that SNP helped learners to become more proactively involved in class. Besides quality, non-delivery of bread on a daily basis was singled out as the biggest problem with SNP by one of the learners. This learner added that her wish was for “bread to be delivered everyday because sometimes we come to school on an empty stomach.” Another learner said that butter and jam should be delivered everyday as it sometimes does not get delivered. Four said they would like the nutritional drink to be changed as it did not taste good.

4. Suppliers

Four of the eight suppliers responsible for delivering food to the selected schools took part in the study. Two suppliers refused to take part in the study, while one who had committed to taking part in the study had not responded by the time this report was finalised. One supplier could not be contacted on her mobile phone.⁵¹ The four suppliers who took part in the study expressed satisfaction with the support they got from the Department. Three of them said that such support was “excellent”, with one saying it was “good”. They all reported that there were times when they failed to deliver food to school. Reasons given for this failure included that there were poor access roads. Two of the suppliers reported that another reason was due to late payments by the Education Department.⁵² When asked whether the Department had ensured that suppliers were afforded access at all reasonable times to the relevant locations, systems and data required to meet the obligations of their contracts, two of the respondents said “yes”. One supplier said the Department had failed to meet this obligation, while the fourth respondent gave no answer.

⁵¹ Five suppliers were contacted telephonically, but only two of those contacted responded to the questionnaire. Letters and the questionnaire were also sent by facsimile to the suppliers the PSAM was able to contact. This was followed up by phoning the suppliers to confirm receipt of the facsimile and requests for return dates. Two of the suppliers who took part in the study, completed the questionnaire with assistance by the PSAM researcher responsible for this study.

⁵² Two of the suppliers also reported that they had no direct relationship with the Department as they claimed through the manufacturer.

When asked how the SNP could be improved, suppliers stressed that improving and maintaining access roads could solve the problem and that suppliers should be allocated schools in the same area to ensure that food was delivered everyday as they claimed that the schools they had to feed were scattered. Two suppliers even suggested changing the menu and not delivering bread on a daily basis. According to one of the respondents, prompt payment of suppliers would improve upon their delivery.

5. District coordinators

The PSAM contacted the SNP district coordinators for each of the five districts and they all responded to the questionnaire.

According to the Eastern Cape Department of Education, SNP coordinators have the responsibility to manage SNP resources; plan and organise SNP workshops; interact with relevant stakeholders; monitor SNP service delivery by SNP service providers; manage conflict; write reports (daily, weekly or monthly); establish food security initiatives in schools; ensure compliance of service providers to the Service Level Agreement; manage the database of meal servers and verify learner numbers.⁵³ On their understanding of their role in the SNP, all five district coordinators said that their role was to monitor feeding by visiting schools and also monitoring service providers. One respondent also added that their role was to receive and deal with complaints on feeding irregularities from schools. Another district coordinator said that their role was to receive complaints from suppliers and also to monitor their performance through reports they get from schools.

5.1 Experience in working with the SNP

The Department of Education took responsibility for the School Nutrition Programme in 2004 and as result none of the district coordinators had SNP work experience prior to 2004. Two of the district coordinators indicated they had started working in the SNP in April 2005 while a third had started in 2006 and was still in an acting position. The remaining two coordinators had been working in the SNP since 2004. One of the district coordinators (who had started working in the SNP in 2004) said her responsibilities were "To monitor feeding by visiting schools benefiting from the SNP, receive and deal with all complaints on feeding irregularities from schools and monitor service providers."

There were varied responses from the five district coordinators when asked about the frequency of their visits to schools within their district. Two of the district coordinators indicated that school visits occurred more than once a week. While one district coordinator said "Schools are meant to be visited from Monday to Thursday, but the problem is personnel and there is only one vehicle that is used by the district. Often the vehicle is used by other division within the district." The remaining two district coordinators explained that school visits took place "once a year" and "fortnightly".

When asked how often they conducted the assessment of the quality of food delivered, one district coordinator contradicted his earlier response regarding the frequency of visits to schools by indicating that this assessment occurred "more than once a month". Earlier this district coordinator had indicated that school visits take place "once a year".

⁵³ Eastern Cape Department of Education, Job Advertisement. EP Herald 07 August 2007.

One of the district coordinators explained that schools should be visited weekly, but revealed that this was not happening due to capacity problems. She also added that there was only one vehicle in the district which was specifically for the SNP, but it was often used for other purposes.⁵⁴

When asked how often they assessed food quality, two of the district coordinators said that food delivered by the suppliers did not always comply with the Department's specifications and that they had had to either inform the supplier or return the food to the supplier. One district co-ordinator said that this non-compliance only happened on the day that she had visited the school, but that it did not happen often. The district coordinators who had reported that there were instances of non-compliance explained that suppliers had been informed more than once of their failure to comply with the terms of their service level agreements. One district coordinator said action taken against the supplier depended on the reports they received from the schools.

As regards the non-payment of suppliers, only one of the district coordinators indicated that suppliers had raised complaints over non-payment by the Department. This, however, is contradicted by three of the suppliers' responses, who indicated that one of the reasons for their failure to deliver was due to non-payment by the Department. Three of the suppliers also revealed that they did not claim payments directly from the Department, but through a manufacturer which made direct claims from the Department. What remains unclear, though, is how these sub-contractors lodge their complaints, whether to the manufacturer or the Department.

When asked how the SNP could be improved, the district coordinators emphasised the need for decentralisation of functions from head office; the recruitment of personnel to improve monitoring in districts; consultation with district offices whenever new suppliers were to be allocated schools; limiting the number of schools a supplier had to feed or contracting suppliers who were familiar with the geographical area in which they were required to perform their obligations. Three of the district coordinators even suggested using local suppliers.

One district coordinator even suggested that tenders should be awarded to local suppliers as some suppliers failed due to the excessive distances between their warehouses and the schools. One of the district coordinator's said:

Food must be sourced locally as this would address late deliveries; more sub-contractors should be employed to allow for them to have fewer schools; tenders must be awarded to local suppliers who know the geographical area; employ more personnel; the vehicle must be used for its purpose and not for anything else.

These suggestions are especially important, given the fact that the provincial SNP office acknowledged that there was a lack of proper consultation with district offices prior to the introduction of the revised SNP at the beginning of the 2007 school year.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ This respondent claimed that she could not do anything about this as the decision to use the vehicle was made by the District director. However the responsibility to manage SNP resources still rests with the SNP coordinator.

⁵⁵ Meeting with the Assistant Director for SNP, 13 July 2007 Bhishe.

While there have been improvements since the suspension of the community co-operatives model in December 2006, serious problems and challenges remain within the School Nutrition Programme, with learners continuing to be negatively affected by these problems.

As indicated earlier, half of the school coordinators indicated that the situation had improved, but raised concerns over food delivery times and the quality of food being delivered. The research revealed that district offices and the Education Department's Head Office continue to display an inability to effectively monitor the performance of suppliers against the requirements of service level agreements. This failure also points to the Department's non-compliance with its obligations as clearly stated in the service level agreement.

The PSAM's visits to the schools revealed that suppliers often delivered only once or twice a week and did not regularly deliver all foodstuffs as required by the terms of the service level agreements entered into with the Education Department. This ongoing state of affairs indicates that district coordinators have not monitored supplier's adherence to such service level agreements in a consistent manner. This failure has meant that school coordinators have had to attempt to shoulder the burden of holding suppliers accountable for the efficient performance of their contractual obligations.

The fact that six out of eight schools visited reported that no district officials had visited them is indicative of serious capacity problems at district level. This is further supported by the suggestion by district coordinators that more personnel should be employed to assist with the monitoring and administration of the SNP.⁵⁶ In addition, all but one district coordinator in the districts contacted, revealed that there was only one person responsible for the SNP. Four of the five district coordinators who participated in this study emphasised the need for additional staff to be employed in order to manage the programme more effectively.

Only two of the eight schools had received food on the day the PSAM visited them at times when the food should already have arrived. In addition, five of the eight school coordinators indicated that feeding did not take place at the specified time due to late deliveries. This was, according to district coordinators, primarily due to the Department awarding contracts to suppliers without having established at the outset whether these contractors had the capacity to deliver in the areas where they were supposed to perform the contracted services. There were suggestions by some of the district coordinators that they be consulted whenever new suppliers are to be allocated schools. This confirmed the PSAM's view that this process appears to have been centralised without proper consultation with district offices.

There were also suggestions that more sub-contractors needed to be employed as the current suppliers had often failed to honour their contractual obligations due to the large number of schools which they had to serve. This would, according to district coordinators, ensure that suppliers deliver on time.

The ongoing non-payment of meal servers at the schools visited is unsatisfactory and requires urgent attention by the Education Department. Despite these women's integral

⁵⁶ The meeting between the PSAM and the SNP Assistant Director also revealed that there were serious capacity issues that hampered the effective delivery of SNP.

role in ensuring that food is distributed to needy learners, the Education Department has, for reasons which only it can explain, failed to remunerate such vital agents of the SNP. When the PSAM visited the schools in August 2007, meal servers explained that they had not been paid since the beginning of the year. This is concerning given that this does not affect the remuneration of permanent staff of the Education Department.

District coordinators claimed that the payment of meal servers remained the responsibility of the provincial office as they only had to submit registers for the processing of such payments. There were also suggestions in their responses that “decentralisation of funds would improve the programme.” While the PSAM is not against this idea, it would be important for districts to ensure that meal server’s claims are capable of verification.⁵⁷ In addition, the Department needs to ensure that there are competent personnel who have the capacity to manage these payments at district level.

CONCLUSION

The study has found that the administration and the implementation of the SNP in the Eastern Cape are still plagued by serious problems. As indicated above, there are inconsistencies in the delivery of meals to schools which have a negative impact on the productive tuition of learners in schools. This is of concern, given that some learners and school coordinators have reported that some of the learners depend on school feeding for their only meal of the day. It is therefore a matter that needs to be taken seriously by those charged with providing quality education to the vulnerable children in the province. As the study also found, non-payment of meal servers is another indication of a failure by the Department to improve its administration of the programme.

Lack of planning remains a challenge in the Department. This study found that there was a lack of proper consultation before the resumption of SNP at the beginning of the year, resulting in some districts failing to meet the Department’s obligation due to capacity problems, suppliers failing to deliver due to lack of familiarity with the schools which they had to serve, and poor monitoring.

Were these issues to be addressed, the Department would definitely improve its service to the learners who should remain the main beneficiaries of the School Nutrition Programme.

⁵⁷ This is especially important given that the 2006/07 Auditor-General’s report found that not all payments made to meal servers could be verified and the accuracy could not be determined.

Key findings and Recommendation

Finding

- Of the eight schools visited by the PSAM, only two had had food delivered on time by suppliers. The PSAM also found that only two schools had been able to adhere to the feeding time of between 8 am and 10 am due to the late delivery of food by suppliers.
- The Department is not effectively monitoring the performance of suppliers and taking corrective steps against defaulting suppliers as required by the service level agreements.
- The PSAM found that critical shortages of departmental personnel, particularly at district level, impacted negatively on the Education Department's ability to administer and monitor the SNP.
- Meal servers claimed that they had not been paid for their services since the beginning of 2007.
- All the suppliers indicated that they experienced serious delays in payments by the Department

Recommendation

- The Department needs to urgently address its staff shortages to ensure effective administration and monitoring of the SNP. This will enable the Department to take decisive steps against non-compliance with the service level agreement, both on the part of service providers and public servants. This will also ensure effective delivery and administration of the SNP in schools, including expeditious payment of both service providers and meal servers.

Finding

- There was insufficient consultation with district offices when the current suppliers were appointed, and as a result it emerged from both the suppliers and district coordinators, that it was difficult for the suppliers to deliver food on time to all the schools due to the fact that their locations were too widely scattered.

Recommendation

- The Department's planning should ensure that the process is inclusive (all the relevant stakeholders are consulted), involves up-to-date information on the number of children eligible for the SNP, and the extent of human resources needs, both at provincial and district level.

Finding

- School coordinators, suppliers and district coordinators reported that suppliers were not delivering consistently and on time.

Recommendation

- District offices of the Education Department must improve on the monitoring of supplier's service level agreements. This may require increased personnel and resources to undertake improved on-site monitoring of suppliers performance. A complaints procedure should be implemented to track and respond to complaints lodged by school coordinators who experience unsatisfactory levels of delivery from suppliers.
- The Department must, prior to awarding tenders to service providers, establish whether prospective service providers have the capacity to deliver foodstuffs effectively and efficiently.