A working paper on the SNV TIDE School Milk Programme in South Western Uganda
The School Milk Project initiative

The Netherlands Development Organisation SNV Uganda is implementing a four year dairy project - the Inclusive Dairy Enterprise (TIDE) in six districts in South Western Uganda, funded by the Netherlands Embassy. The project enables small and medium sized dairy farmers and their organisations to improve their incomes and the nutritional status of their families.

South Western Uganda is among the regions in Uganda with the highest malnutrition rates in children under five currently registered at 31% (UDHS 2016). Although the region is the cattle corridor in Uganda with high volumes of milk traded daily, the majority of primary school age children in South Western Uganda study on empty stomachs and school absenteeism is high. An assessment of Ugandan school children aged 9–15 years in 2006–2007 revealed that 8.7% were stunted (low height for age), 13% underweight (low weight for age) and 10.1% thin (low weight for height) respectively (Acham et al. 2012). The SNV TIDE project, implemented since October 2015, uses several strategies to achieve its objectives, one of which is the improvement of dairy household nutrition. The project aims to increase dairy production in a climate smart way through training of dairy farmers, strengthening of key services for dairy farmers and promoting on-farm investment, preferably through cooperative institutions, with support from the financial services sector. In addition, the functioning of the dairy value chain is improved by introducing a focus on milk quality, strengthening the cold chain and supporting a shift in retail from raw milk to processed milk. Alongside working towards improving the dairy farming practices, SNV TIDE also focuses on improving the nutritional practices within the dairy households through the school milk programme (SMP).

The SMP rationale

A daily school meal is a vital incentive to keep children in schools and it allows them to concentrate on their studies. School food is in essence vital for achieving education for all (Drake et al., 2015). Schools also provide a huge opportunity to (re)set norms about healthy diets and good nutrition practices (IFPRI, 2016). By bringing processors, cooperatives and partners together, the SNV TIDE project targets vulnerable households and children through school milk campaigns to improve their nutritional status and awareness. The SNV TIDE project is supporting the introduction of school milk in six districts in southwest Uganda: Mbarara, Isingiro, Kiruhura, Sheema, Bushenyi and Ntungamo. It uses a non-subsidy approach, and supports schools to persuade parents to contribute to the costs of the purchase of milk and to link them to suppliers. In the six districts a baseline study was done to assess the nutritional status for lower primary pupils (P1 – P3). In terms of distribution, Sheema (5.4 %) and Ntungamo (3.9 %) had a larger number of malnourished school children compared to Bushenyi (1.9 %) and Kiruhura (2.2 %).

A multilevel SMP strategy is envisaged, acknowledging that:  
- At individual level, feeding of and good nutrition for school attending children is important. Direct benefits are an improved nutritional status and physiological development; consumption of milk provides the human body with essential nutrients that are essential for growth and development. Indirect benefits are improved cognitive development, learning and school enrolment;
- At school level, school feeding improves parental and community participation in school activities, increases children’s concentration in the class room and hence overall children’s performance in class. Currently, 26% of day schools in Uganda provide at least one meal a day, more in urban than in rural areas.
- At societal level, school feeding programmes have the potential to contribute to good food and nutrition of school children, thus contribution to family well-being and nationwide human resources.

The aim of SNV TIDE SMP is to promote milk consumption among school going children to improve their nutritional status, thus cultivating a milk drinking culture and subsequently creating new market for milk across the region through schools. In addition, community nutrition approaches around the school will be used to further address dietary diversity in dairy farm households (See figure 1: TIDE SMP approach).
The SNV TIDE project has launched the campaign on school milk promotion to have all schools in the six districts providing milk to all school going children. Provision of school milk is parent led with parents contributing towards the provision of milk either in cash or in kind. Provision of school milk also supports the development of the dairy sector by increasing milk sales in the short term and milk demand and market in the long term. A total of 21 dairy cooperatives have been linked to schools and preparing to sign supply agreements between the schools and the cooperatives.

In the TIDE school milk business case, it is the role of parents to mobilize funds to buy milk and other consumables like firewood to boil the milk. After this commitment by schools and parents, TIDE through a matching grant approach (50% TIDE, 50% parents) supports schools with the construction of kitchens, purchase of saucepans, purchase of water harvest tanks, construction of fuel efficient cooking stoves and installation of water purification systems. SNV TIDE entered into partnership with Impact Water, a social enterprise making filtering equipment available to schools for providing safe water to children.

The non-capital investments (specifically the sensitization and advocacy campaign) is 100% funded by TIDE to build a critical mass in the community that supports the school milk programme. All schools participating in the initial phase of the school milk project were offered a subsidy of 50% on the filter equipment. Within a very short time 50 schools had signed up for this offer. The attraction was the marketing approach of Impact Water and the payment conditions they were offering (an interest free loan, with repayment over 5 terms). In the follow up phase of the project subsidy levels went down to 25%.

**Alignment with Uganda School feeding Policy Guidelines**

The key activity of SNV TIDE under nutrition, a campaign to promote school milk using a zero subsidy approach, is positioned to act as a national pilot for the national school feeding and nutrition policy guidelines. In a bid to support national school feeding initiatives, SNV entered into a public-private partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Dairy Development Authority (DDA) to use the SMP to pilot implementation of the National School Feeding and Nutrition Policy Guidelines (MOES, 2013).

The Ministry of Education and Sports of Uganda developed guidelines in 2013 to streamline school feeding and health. These policy guidelines provide strategic guidance in the implementation of the SNV TIDE school milk campaign. Seeking alignment with government policies from the start is an important component of TIDE’s SMP strategy. Under the partnership, SNV and the partners have committed to jointly monitor and evaluate the SMP progress and document success stories with the aim of a possible national scale up.
The unique partnership, underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding, SNV TIDE collaborates with the Government of Uganda, representing the Ministries of Education and Sports, Health, Agriculture, the DDA, Departments and Agencies (MDA) and other stakeholders in School Feeding and Nutrition to facilitate a national policy dialogue on school feeding so as to influence policy and actions towards ending hunger and undernutrition in schools. At national level a technical working group was established providing technical support to implementation and linkages to national level policies plus provision of joint supervision to the implementing schools.

The focus is on the operationalization of the national policy guidelines on school feeding and nutrition. The main objective is to use the SMP model to contribute towards the strengthening of multi-stakeholder coordination and advocacy for improved school feeding and nutrition outcomes in the country. This is built upon three objectives that are to:

(i) Appraise the implementation of the school feeding and nutrition policy guidelines using the SMP as a point of departure.
(ii) Generate consensus on good practices and recommendations for improving school feeding and nutrition in Uganda.
(iii) Increase advocacy efforts towards increased resource mobilisation and investment into the improvement of school feeding and nutrition outcomes.

### Operationalisation of a parent-led SMP Approach

Institutional mechanisms and structures have been put into place at multiple levels to support and promote the programme. At national level, a SMP Task Force was established through partnership with the ministries responsible for Education, Health, Agriculture and the DDA. This team which also comprises members of the National Nutrition Technical Working Group under the Office of the Prime Minister provides oversight and technical support in the implementation of the SMP. It also provides a linkage to national level policies and the provision of joint support supervision to the implementing schools.

In each district, there is a District School Milk Programme Task Force headed by the District Education Officer with both technical and political leaders including the Resident District Commissioner, Local Council Chairperson, Chief Administrative Officer and members of the District Nutrition Coordination Committee. The DS District School Milk Programme Task Force is responsible to the overall sensitization and mobilization of communities to support the school milk programme.

At the school level, the school management together with the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) support the programme through advocacy. They assist lobby parents to pay for the milk. Schools have also been supported to establish School Nutrition Committees to oversee the purchase of milk, preparation of the milk and actual feeding of the children. Through PPPs with the districts and local service providers, SNV TIDE has supported some of the early-adopting schools with 50% matching grants on water purification systems, saucepans and other supported training of teachers on hand-washing, hygiene, deworming and vitamin A supplementation.

Overall implementation and coordination of district and school based school milk activities is done by local capacity builders (LCBs) who are responsible for working with the district school milk task force to market and popularize the school milk programme, draw district plans and lead the implementation of the planned activities. These LCBs are directly contracted by SNV TIDE to perform these tasks.
Main results of the parent led SMP in South Western Uganda

In 2016, an initial 77 schools introduced school milk with 33,416 children taking milk as part of midday meals – many of the government schools did not have any form of feeding and children relied entirely on packed food from home while the majority would spend a whole day without any feeding. Currently (October 2017), 80,429 learners in 315 schools are having parent provided school milk, with over 8,700 litres of milk purchased per day by schools in the project area.

Based on monitoring data collected by LCBs and a series of learning workshops covering all districts, a number of achievements are recorded. Overall, in all the districts, the number of schools enrolled on the school milk programme has increased from the initial ten at the pilot phase to currently Ntungamo 55, Kiruhura 52, Isingiro 55, Bushenyi 52, Sheema 50, and Mbarara 51 (Figure 2).

![Figure 2](image)

Figure 2: Schools enrolled in SNV TIDE programme 2016-2017

There has been a substantial increase in the number of children taking milk in most schools. Overall, over 80,000 children are benefitting from the SMP, 46% of them boys, and 54% of them girls (Figure 3).

![Figure 3](image)

Figure 3: Number of children in SMP (October 2017)

The SNV TIDE SMP has currently set a minimum of 100 millilitre per learner per day – despite a recommended volume of 200 millilitre a day - or 1 litre for 10 learners is being implemented. The milk is mostly added to maize porridge and given to learners as a hot meal. In practice, the daily average serving is 90 millilitre, ranging from 60 mls (in Ntungamo) to 130 millilitre (Kiruhura). The average price per litre is 1000 UGX, ranging from 967 UGX in Kiruhura to 1099 UGX in Bushenyi. No linear relationship was observed between milk price and serving size (Figure 4).

![Figure 4](image)

Figure 4: Average volume of milk purchased against average price per district

Spin offs of the SMP were also noted. An increase in school enrolment voiced by the school head teachers is attributed to SMP, and registered in most schools alongside improved school attendance and a reduction in absenteeism. Access to safe drinking water contributed largely to the latter as a result of the SNV matching grants, supporting integration of clean water purification system, energy saving technologies and child health through deworming. A great reduction of water borne diseases, especially diarrhoea, typhoid and flu has been observed in most schools that were supplied with water purification systems. For example in Isingiro, a head teacher testified that his school expenditure on treating diarrheal diseases dropped from UGX 600,000 to less than UGX 200,000 by the end of last term (April 2017).

There is increased sensitization through use of banners, school calendars, school poems cited by children on the programme and use of religious leaders. Successfully conducted district and sub-county level sensitization meetings involved orientation of sub-county and district leaders on the relevancy and approach to school milk programme. In addition, the SMP is an important stimulus to the local economy through support to the dairy sector.
In Kiruhura district, most of the schools have school feeding committees which have been oriented on school milk programme and MoES School feeding and nutrition guidelines. The formation of the food committees in newly recruited schools and support to the already formed committees is ongoing. This has helped in timely planning for the programme at school level.

In all the six districts, school level orientation meetings on school milk programme for head teachers, PTA and School Milk Committee chairpersons for all TIDE schools were conducted. These were taken through the school milk campaign approach and had action plans after the meetings. This has facilitated overwhelming support for the project at school level. With parents contributing some money for school milk, a venue for sustainability has been opened up with a cultural shift in behaviours with parents taking collective responsibility for the school feeding programme.

Despite the success registered so far in the implementation of the SMP, there is still a challenge of disparity in quantity, preparation, servings provided, and quality assurance measures being applied. Children under the SMP programme can easily be identified from those who were not on the programme because they look healthier, a factor that is encouraging more parents to pay for the milk. There is an urgent need to build consensus on a desirable and standardized menu to inform the SMP and other school food and nutrition programmes in the SNV supported regions and to promote school feeding for all children.

SMP Learnings

On a routine basis, district learning workshops have been organized to bring together key stakeholders (School based, Local government based and National level based) to share results and learnings from the project. Workshop participants included the members of the district school milk task force, political leaders, head teachers and PTA chairpersons for the schools implementing the TIDE school milk programme.

Grasping opportunities to build unorthodox connections seems essential. The TIDE project design is based on a private sector driven approach. TIDE seeks to capitalise on the current commercialisation trend within the dairy sector by actively supporting farmers who possess a sound business approach and acumen to dairy farming. Through the design and development of products and creation of market based incentives, farmers can access these products with the aim of increasing production in a climate smart way, through training of farmers, strengthening of key services for dairy farmers and promoting on-farm investment, preferably through cooperative institutions and with support from the financial services sector. Schools need to purchase milk from cooperatives to ensure consistent supply of good quality milk.

Seeking alignment with ongoing policy developments pays off. The school milk campaign came at a time when the issue of parents paying fees at school was highly politicised and government was against any form of payment. However, TIDE’s engagement with National and local actors built overwhelming support from top to bottom.

Main challenges

Organisation at school level can be a challenge. Schools usually fall short in adequate kitchen provisions and facilities, such as place to cook, fire place, cooking utensils, or (number of) sauce pans. Good knowledge on what and how to prepare the food, and access to safe water, are real concerns from a food safety perspective. Also high cost for fuel and maize flour are causes of concern, increasing the school feeding bill. Maize flour is now relatively expensive than milk.

Planning the meals may interfere with the daily schedule in schools, the time to take milk or porridge, usually break time has been noted to encroach on the studying time. Whereas some schools supply the milk procured to all pupils without distinguishing between children of parents contributing to the programme and those parents who do not. Other schools just distribute the milk (enriched porridge) to the children of contributing parents.
Schools face challenges in managing children consuming milk vis à vis those that are not taking milk.

Consistency of daily milk supply is a concern. Price volatility, in particular price increases, may jeopardise the milk supply, in quantity as well as in quality. Particularly in rural areas, supply levels remain low as most milk is transported to urban areas. Also, milk procurement is not well streamlined with school food committees as food committees are not involved in milk / food procurement. Inconsistency in milk supply also occurs where suppliers at times supply the milk late and the students have to take porridge without milk. In addition, schools generally lack good storage facilities to keep the milk. On the other hand, due to little milk uptake in schools, suppliers find it difficult to transport the milk to schools charging the schools an extra cost for transport.

Organising parental engagement is a challenge. Generally, the involvement of men in the SMP implementation was low. Some parents believe that feeding children in school is a governmental rather than a parental responsibility, resulting in uncooperative attitude. In some areas, in particular non-pastoral zones, this was related to food habits and cultures in place, people preferring other foods like matoke over milk. In some districts, the number of parents participating in school supervision visits is rather low. Also, some parents delay payments of the feeding fund, or require special funding schemes, or do not pay at all, thus hampering the implementation at school level.

Organising community engagement is also a challenge. In some areas, some local leaders have never been oriented about the project hence resulting in lack of cooperation among parent’s teachers and local leaders, or head teachers. Lack of a nutrition specialist to handle technical nutrition issues in all the districts except Kiruhura district where the LCB has staff with Nutrition background.

**Future outlook**

Cost affordability is a key driver to success and sustainability of the school milk programme. The SNV TIDE project supports the introduction of school milk, which operates without direct subsidy, with matching grants, which is a big help. However, the concept of matching grants has not been comprehensively understood by schools and requires active support in implementation and follow up procedures.

Active parental involvement in food committees is driver for success in sustaining and expanding the school milk programme. The District Task Force has played an important role in introducing the campaign to the various schools as well as in supporting the school milk programme at district level through mobilizing parents, and sensitization meetings with support of LCBs. Meetings for schools to exchange experience should be organized to allow best performing schools share their success tips with poorly performing schools. SNV, through LCBs, could also support school exchange visits among all participating schools.

Making the SMP programme work at school level requires the provision of good kitchen facilities and cooking utensils. All schools should be provided with saucepans irrespective of the percentage of children taking milk.

Accountability and documentation should be strengthened at different levels. Sharing information with parents (during PTA meetings) on how the money charged for the school milk programme is allocated, and spent will avoid misuse of funds and help convince parents on the effectiveness and credibility of the funds charged for the school milk programme. The LCBs can support the school management committees to accurately calculate the amount of money required for school milk. Rephrasing the money charged for the school milk programme from milk fee’ to ‘milk fund’ is recommended.

To enhance parent engagement, continuous and regular sensitization of parents remains necessary. Meetings on the relevancy of school feeding should be conducted in all participating schools especially at the beginning of each term as proposed by most head teachers. There is a general need for more sensitization on dietary diversity, based on locally available foods (for example the green amaranth, orange fresh sweet potatoes and milk). The community nutrition component needs to be further developed. Moving forward is to link community nutrition to the school milk programme where the schools will be the entry point and parents will be mobilized, parent groups formed around the school locality and sensitized. In particular school farms interested in rearing cattle should be linked to the district production unit to obtain improved breeds that yield more milk. The initial schools enrolled into the school milk programme will be used as pilot for the model.
The engagement of the community and local authorities is key. There is need for deepening the involvement of and alignment with local authorities. All local leaders should be oriented about the programme and should always be invited for parent sensitization meetings. Religious leaders should also be involved as campaign agents for school feeding, and religious platforms could be used for accessing parents who do not attend school meetings. The role of district school milk task force needs to go beyond sensitization meetings but expand regular supervision and monitoring. Involvement of political leaders in the school milk sensitization meetings should be prioritized as parents believe more in their leaders. To further strengthen advocacy, periodic programme review meetings involving jointly political and religious leaders, parents and school management committees should be conducted for easy follow up of the programme.

Sources

- SNV 2017: SNV TIDE Annual report 2016
- MoES 2013: School feeding guidelines
- SNV 2016: Memorandum of Understanding