

Fortaleza report: Second School Meals Coalition Global Summit



The School Meals Coalition was launched at the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit with a clear objective: ensuring that every child, everywhere, has access to a healthy and nutritious school meal by 2030. Led by Member States and supported by a Secretariat hosted by the World Food Programme (WFP), the Coalition has rapidly grown into one of the most dynamic multilateral platforms for action. Today, it brings together over 110 countries, 150 partners, and six regional bodies, united around a shared commitment to strengthening national school meal programmes as drivers of learning, human capital, and food systems transformation.

Significant progress has been achieved in just a few years. According to the State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024, school meal programmes now reach 466 million children globally, an increase of almost 80 million since 2020 and a 20 percent growth overall. Low- and lower-middle-income countries, where the needs are greatest, registered the fastest expansion, with coverage rising by nearly 60 percent in only two years. Global investment in school feeding has reached US\$84 billion annually, with 99 percent financed by national governments, underscoring that this is no longer an aid-led agenda but a public policy priority. Africa has led much of this growth, adding 20 million children to school meal programmes, while countries such as Canada, Indonesia, and Ukraine have launched or expanded nationwide initiatives for the first time.

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The Second Global Summit of the School Meals Coalition, held on 18-19 September 2025 in Fortaleza, Brazil, under the high patronage of President Lula da Silva, confirmed this accelerating momentum. The Summit gathered around 80 Coalition member states, over 30 at Ministerial level, and about 60 partner organizations, taking stock of progress since the first Global Summit in Paris in 2023, and setting a renewed vision for the years ahead. Discussions centered on the [Coalition's six priorities](#) set by the Coalition Taskforce for 2025-2026:

1. Make school meals a political and fiscal priority globally and expand access to sustainable finance
2. Move from commitments to action at country level
3. Strengthen evidence for better decision making and more cost-efficient programmes
4. Measure results and report on progress of the Coalition
5. Empower cities and municipalities to make progress
6. Prioritize high-level participation in the next Global Meeting and related advocacy events

Governments presented concrete achievements—from rapid coverage expansion and new legislation to increased investment, stronger nutrition standards, digital monitoring systems, home-grown procurement models, and sustainable financing strategies. The Summit was a powerful moment of collective resolve, with member states announcing new national commitments, bringing the total to 66 and demonstrating strong leadership. Partners showcased complementary initiatives in research, climate, education, and city-level

action. Across all discussions, a shared message emerged: school meals are a strategic tool to improve learning outcomes, strengthen social protection, stimulate local economies, advance gender equality, promote healthier diets, and support sustainable and resilient food systems. The Fortaleza Summit marked a new milestone for the Coalition, setting out a renewed vision and collective priorities for the years ahead as countries work toward achieving universal access to nutritious school meals by 2030.

The Summit culminated with the [Outcomes Statement](#)¹ of the co-Chairs, which provides a summary of the main outcomes of the second Global Summit and what is next for the Coalition.

While the Outcome Statement captures what was achieved, this report offers a comprehensive account of the Summit proceedings, including a summary of all interventions by member countries and partners. It is intended for governments, partners, and stakeholders who require detailed information on the discussions and commitments made at the Summit.



From left to right: Ms. Fernanda Pacobahyba, President of the National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE), Brazil; Mr. H.E. Thani Mohamed-Soilihi, Minister Delegate for Francophonie and International Partnerships, France; H.E. Mr. Ville Tavo, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, Finland; Ms. Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, Programme Operations, World Food Programme

¹ The Outcomes statement is available in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish in the page of the School Meals Coalition website dedicated to the Summit:

<https://schoolmealscoalition.org/2nd-global-summit-school-meals-coalition>

1. Opening Session: Political Leadership and Renewed Global Commitment

The Summit opened with a strong affirmation of school meals as one of the most powerful public policies to advance equity, learning, health, and human development. Leaders from Brazil, France, Finland, WFP, and local authorities underlined that ensuring every child has access to nutritious meals at school is both a moral imperative and a strategic investment in national futures. Their interventions set the tone for a Summit focused on action, solidarity, and shared responsibility, showcasing the Brazil national School Meals Programme as a model of inter-sectoral collaboration and shared responsibility, and directly advancing School Meals Coalition Priority 1: Making school meals a political and fiscal priority globally.

Brazil – First Lady and Brazil ambassador for school meals, Janja Lula da Silva

Speaking as Brazil's Ambassador for School Meals through a video message, Ms. Janja Lula da Silva emphasized that school meals are not merely food but engines of health, learning, citizenship, and hope. She recalled the setbacks caused by years of disinvestment and celebrated the renewed political will that helped Brazil once again leave the Hunger Map, driven by stronger public food stocks, the removal of ultra-processed foods from school meals, support to family and peasant farming, and respect for indigenous and traditional food cultures. The message highlighted the transformative impact of school meals on girls' education and linked President Lula's historic pledge that every child must have breakfast, lunch, and dinner to the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, launched under the G20. It closed with a powerful reminder:

**“every school meal served
is also a seed of the future.”**

Brazil – Fernanda Pacobahyba, President of Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação (FNDE)

President Fernanda Pacobahyba reaffirmed Brazil's commitment to school meals as a pillar of education and social justice, highlighting Brazil's National School Meals Programme (PNAE) scale, with 50 million meals served daily, and its pioneering rule requiring at least 30% of the federal school meals resources must be directed to purchase food products from family farmers, with plans to raise the national minimum to 45% as well as the emphasis on women farmers' inclusion and cultural relevance. For Brazil, international cooperation will be critical to ensure all 724 million school-age children receive nutritious meals by 2030.

France – Minister Delegate Thani Mohamed-Soilihi

France stressed school meals as tools for equity and ecological transition, citing €140 million France invested since 2021, US\$ 30 billion mobilized at the Nutrition for Growth Summit and their support to Ukraine, providing meals to 150,000 students during wartime. The Minister praised the Coalition's role in reaching tens of millions more children and called for stronger data systems and urgent action to guarantee that every child receives a healthy school meal.

Finland – Minister Ville Tavio

Finland underscored its century-long tradition of free school meals and their transformative impact on equality, economic growth, and human capital. The Minister reaffirmed Finland's commitment as co-chair to country-led programmes, emphasizing that governments must remain owners of their systems. He encouraged deeper partnerships, including with the private sector, to expand efficiency and innovation, and called for progress on sustainable financing, monitoring tools, and equity.

World Food Programme – Executive Director Cindy McCain

Cindy McCain described school meals as one of the most powerful tools to change lives, especially for girls. She urged governments to expand leadership and solidarity amid global hunger crises, emphasizing that today's actions can transform tomorrow.

Brazil – Renata Silveira Carvalho, Federal Court of Accounts (TCU)

Renata Silveira Carvalho highlighted the Court's role in oversight and governance, linking school meals to national Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) commitments and Brazil's leadership of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). She reaffirmed the Court's commitment to global knowledge-sharing and stronger accountability.

Brazil – Evandro Leitão, Mayor of Fortaleza

The Mayor presented Fortaleza's reform, launched in 2025, providing daily protein-rich meals to 270,000 children and integrating local food culture. He emphasized links to family farming and broader municipal efforts against hunger, framing school meals as a foundation of social justice and community cohesion.

Brazil – Wellington Dias, Minister of Social Development

Minister Dias noted Brazil's removal of 29 million people from hunger and positioned Brazil's National School Meals Programme as central to this achievement, contributing to learning and rural development. He called for international cooperation to expand access to nutritious school meals.

Brazil – Camilo Santana, Minister of Education

Minister Santana celebrated the presence of 80 delegations and Brazil's National School Meals Programme's 70-year legacy as a universal, free programme delivering 10 billion meals annually. He reaffirmed Brazil's commitment as co-chair of the Coalition calling for deeper cooperation, better nutritional standards, and more investment.

Brazil – Elmano de Freitas, Governor of Ceará

Governor de Freitas outlined Ceará's dual focus on food security for families — including the Ceará Without Hunger programme serving 130,000 daily meals — and rural development through direct purchases from small farmers. Ceará has approved a new law banning ultra-processed foods from all schools by 2027, positioning the state as a national pioneer in child health and nutrition.

Brazil – Vice President Geraldo Alckmin

Vice President Alckmin affirmed that no public policy is more important than those supporting children's development. He praised Brazil's progress in lifting almost 30 million people out of hunger and reaffirmed that prioritizing education and nutrition is a strategic choice for the future.

2. Global Progress: State of School Feeding 2024 & National Commitments

The first session highlighted the collective progress achieved since the launch of the School Meals Coalition and celebrated the release of the State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024 report. School meals have expanded rapidly in every region, driven by strong political leadership, rising domestic investment, and a shared commitment to placing school meals at the center of national development strategies.

Countries presented a wide range of achievements: new laws, national strategies, domestic financing mechanisms, digital monitoring systems, expansions of coverage, and stronger links to family farming and nutrition, reflecting Priority 2: moving from commitments to action at country level and Priority 4: measuring results and reporting progress. Together, their interventions offered a strong affirmation that school meals are now recognized globally as a foundational public policy for equity, education, nutrition, and resilience.

Global Overview – State of School Feeding Worldwide

The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024, a flagship publication of the World Food Programme produced through the Coalition's Data and Monitoring Initiative, shows that school meal programmes now reach 466 million children—an increase of nearly 80 million since 2020. The past two years saw the fastest growth in low-income countries, with a 60% scale-up, and in Africa nearly 20 million additional learners are now covered, mostly through domestic financing. Global investment has grown to US\$84 billion—about US\$36 billion more than in 2022—with 99% coming from national budgets, showing strong government ownership. The report also highlights the Global School Meals Database, launched and developed by the Data and Monitoring Initiative earlier in 2025, which provides the first unified platform with comprehensive data on school meal programmes from more than 170 countries.



At least

466

MILLION CHILDREN

receiving school
meals globally



Global investment now

US\$84

BILLION

annually



At least

107

COUNTRIES

now have
school meals policy

Burundi

Burundi reaffirmed its determination to expand school feeding as a flagship national priority: they aim to raise coverage from 24 percent to 50 percent by 2027 and achieve universal access by 2032. Plans include updating the national programme, strengthening nutrition standards, and integrating food fortification in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The government stressed inter-ministerial coordination and local procurement as critical for sustainability.

Cameroon

Cameroon outlined major advances in institutionalizing school feeding as a national public policy. The country recently validated its National School Feeding Strategy and National Sustainable Financing Strategy, marking a clear shift from externally supported projects to a government-led programme. For the first time, school feeding has been included in the national budget framework, and domestic allocations will be progressively expanded. Cameroon announced plans for capacity-building missions across regions to strengthen local implementation, reinforce monitoring systems, and ensure that the programme becomes a sustainable component of the education sector.

Central African Republic

The programme will expand from 174,000 to 230,000 beneficiaries in 2025. The Government is establishing a National Directorate for School Feeding to coordinate policy, ensure programme accountability, and promote the integration of school meals within broader education sector reforms. In a context of widespread vulnerability, the country is linking school meals with local agriculture and community participation to strengthen resilience.

Chile

Chile reaffirmed its commitment to improving the nutritional quality, reach, and intersectoral coordination of its national school meals programme. The Government is focusing on strengthening cooperation between the ministries of education, social development, and health to ensure coherent policies and high-quality services. Chile expressed interest in deeper engagement with the Coalition to share its national experience and access global knowledge on improving child nutrition and school food environments.

Cuba

Cuba is strengthening their national school feeding programme through improvements in nutritional quality, food fortification, and local production. Reforms target supply chains and agricultural development, with strong emphasis on aligning school meals with national nutrition policies and leveraging international cooperation.

Haiti

Haiti highlighted how school meals act as a stabilizing force amid insecurity and economic hardship. The government is prioritizing continuity of services through coordination with humanitarian actors and local communities to protect learning and child nutrition in the most fragile regions.

Indonesia

Indonesia is expanding integrated school nutrition programmes to fight stunting and malnutrition. Actions focus on harmonizing efforts across ministries — including education, health, social protection, and agriculture — and positioning school meals as a strategic investment in human capital that will strengthen the country's competitiveness.

Kyrgyz Republic

The Kyrgyz Republic continues upgrading its national hot meals programme, improving kitchen infrastructure, menu standards, and procurement systems to ensure that meals are healthy, culturally appropriate, and cost-effective. The government reiterated its commitment to expanding access and improving quality, especially in remote and rural schools.

Liberia

Liberia emphasized school feeding as vital for education recovery and resilience. Plans include strengthening governance structures, increasing national ownership, and expanding coverage in underserved areas. Home-grown school feeding is seen as key to revitalizing local agriculture and stimulating rural livelihoods.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Lao People's Democratic Republic reported progress in extending school meals coverage to remote communities with high vulnerability through strong community participation, school gardens, and local procurement. The Government reaffirmed school meals as central to improving attendance, reducing dropout, and promoting equitable access to education.

Luxembourg

Luxembourg reiterated its strong support for school meals as a key pillar of its international cooperation strategy, and its commitment to predictable financing, multilateralism, and evidence-based policymaking, framing school meals as a high-return investment for learning, gender equality, and social inclusion. Luxembourg emphasized the importance of aligning donor support with governments' long-term priorities.

Mali

Mali positioned school feeding as a tool for peace, cohesion and long-term human capital development amid food insecurity, climate shocks, and regional instability. The Government is integrating school meals within national education and social protection strategies, improving cross-sector coordination, and strengthening delivery systems in crisis-affected areas.

Mauritania

Mauritania highlighted efforts to integrate school meals into national social protection and education policies. The Government is expanding access in rural and vulnerable areas, strengthening coordination with local communities, and improving programme quality. School meals are recognized as a key tool for improving attendance and supporting household food security.

Philippines

The Philippines reported continued expansion of its national school meals programme, with a focus on nutrition-sensitive interventions. The Government is investing in improved monitoring systems, menu diversification, and cross-sectoral coordination to tackle learning and nutrition challenges.

Republic of Congo

The Republic of Congo is expanding school meal coverage and improving quality through investments in school kitchens, procurement systems, and stronger links to local farmers. These efforts position school meals as a driver of enrolment, retention, and community engagement, reinforcing their role in education and social development.

Republic of Korea

The Republic of Korea is advancing climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive school meals by increasing the share of local agricultural products, reducing ultra-processed foods, and cutting carbon emissions from operations. The Government is scaling up a public food service integration platform to connect suppliers and schools, fostering efficiency and transparency. Korea also plans to establish a public-private-academic consultative body, share best practices internationally, and leverage ODA and South-South cooperation to adapt its model to partner countries' needs.

Slovenia

Slovenia is strengthening its national school feeding system by providing three meals daily in kindergarten and primary schools, plus a fourth free meal in 90% of schools, with a goal of four free meals for all children by 2027. The country prioritizes local sourcing, organic food, and reducing food waste by 50% by 2030. Internationally, Slovenia has increased food security contributions thirteen-fold, supporting WFP as its main partner and initiatives such as Grain from Ukraine for Sub-Saharan Africa, programmes in Gaza, and projects in Kenya and Madagascar.

Tanzania

Tanzania is scaling up school feeding through integration into the National Food and Nutrition Policy by 2026, increased budget allocations, and stronger community engagement, with coverage expected to rise from 56% to 61% by 2025. The Government is adopting regional guidelines, establishing a national technical working group, and hosting an annual school meals conference. The programme is expanding home-grown components to support smallholder farmers and improve school meal quality.

Yemen

Yemen emphasized the vital role of school meals in a context of conflict and economic crisis, noting efforts to maintain school meal provision despite major operational challenges. The government reaffirmed its commitment to sustain and expand the programme to protect learning and child wellbeing.

Closing Reflections – France

France concluded by recognizing strong political momentum and the shift toward domestic financing and national ownership as drivers of global expansion. It encouraged governments to leverage the Coalition as a platform for learning, cooperation, and innovation and reaffirmed France's commitment to working closely with all partners to advance toward the shared goal of universal access to healthy, nutritious school meals.



From left to right: **Mr. Raymond Tinashe Chikomba**, Senior Nutrition Specialist, Southern Africa Development Community ; **H.E. Dr. John Chrysostom Musingo**, Minister of State for Higher Education, Uganda ; **H.E. Melita Gabrič**, Deputy Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Minister for Development, Slovenia ; **Dr. Daravone Kittiphanh**, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR ; **Mr. Mohammed Omar Salem Basleem**, Head of the Technical Office, Ministry of Education, Yemen ; **H.E. Mr. Oscar Requena**, Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Belize ; **H.E. Mr. Thani Mohamed-Soilihi**, Minister Delegate for Francophonie and International Partnerships, France ; **H.E. Mr. Queba Djaita**, Minister for Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Guinea-Bissau ; **H.E. Dr. Agnes Naa Momo Lartey**, Minister of Gender and Social Protection, Ghana ; **Mr. Mirbek Rakhmatildeev**, Leading Specialist at the Department of School Education, Ministry of Education, Kyrgyz Republic ; **Ms. Cindy McCain**, Executive Director, World Food Programme ; **Sarwono**, Brigadier General (Ret.), Chief Secretary, National Nutrition Agency, Indonesia ; **Mr. Kyu-An Kim**, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Republic of Korea ; **Ms. Karine Silva dos Santos**, General Coordinator of the National School Feeding Programme, Ministry of Education, Brazil

3. Using Evidence for Stronger Decision-Making

This session, co-organised with the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, highlighted how countries are increasingly using evidence, data systems, research partnerships, and cost-benefit analysis to strengthen the design, targeting, and financial sustainability of their school meals programmes. Speakers demonstrated that the rapid scale-up of school meals worldwide is closely linked to governments' ability to collect high-quality data, generate rigorous evidence, and use analytical tools to inform policy decisions. The interventions illustrated how evidence is helping governments improve efficiency, enhance nutritional standards, strengthen procurement models, and make the case for sustained domestic investment, aligning with Priority 3: strengthening evidence for better decision-making and cost-efficient programmes and Priority 4: measuring results and reporting progress.

Global Evidence – Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition

The Research Consortium presented its [Global Evidence Brief](#), highlighting why school meals continue to expand despite fiscal constraints: they deliver strong returns on human capital, shape healthier food systems, and offer consistently positive cost-benefit ratios. The unprecedented global growth in the number of children reached with school meals is driven by the fact that 99 percent of financing now comes from national governments, showing that countries view school feeding as a core public investment rather than an aid programme. The Consortium's global network of more than 1,400 experts across 130 countries continues to generate and consolidate the scientific evidence governments rely on to make informed decisions.

African Union

The African Union reported that 87 million African children now benefit from national school meal programmes, up from 38.4 million in 2013 — a remarkable increase driven by domestic financing and political commitment. School meals are central to Africa's efforts to improve educational outcomes, gender equality, nutritional wellbeing, and resilience in vulnerable communities. The African Union called for stronger collaboration between governments, academia, and the Research Consortium to ensure school meals policies are grounded in reliable evidence that drive progress in education, health, and local agricultural development.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is consolidating fragmented initiatives led by different ministries and partners into a single government-run national programme, currently reaching 3.1 million children with fortified snacks and aiming for 7 million children within five years, covering all primary schools. Procurement, storage, transportation, waste management, and community engagement are persistent challenges that are amplified by the programme's scale and reliance on fully government-run systems. Evidence from previous evaluations continues to guide targeting decisions, operational improvements, and future planning.

Brazil

Brazil showcased a data-driven school meals system investing around US\$1 billion annually, monitored through a network involving federal, state, and municipal authorities. Innovations include an electronic invoice system (Nota Fiscal Eletrônica) linked to the Bank of Brazil for real-time tracking of purchases and compliance with the requirement that at least 30 percent of funds be used to buy from family farmers. Brazil is reducing the limit of ultra-processed foods in schools from 20 percent to 10 percent of spending by 2026 and leveraging research partnerships on climate change and sustainable food systems.

Ghana

Ghana has grown from providing meals to 109 children in 10 schools in 2005 to over 4.2 million children in more than 12,000 schools, fully funded by the government. Key reforms include digitalizing procurement processes, enhancing quality control, and integrating early childhood education policies. Ghana aims for universal coverage by 2030 and continues to refine policies through monitoring and experience-sharing.

Japan

Japan shared its structured, evidence-based approach anchored in legislation, mandatory nutrition and hygiene standards, and annual data collection. The country promotes food and nutrition education (Shokuiku), through 7,000 licensed nutrition teachers who manage meal planning and teach children about balanced diets, caloric intake, and food culture. Japan highlighted several international cooperation initiatives in Malaysia, Mongolia, Indonesia, and Africa, where it shares its technical expertise on safety standards, menu design, and nutrition education. The country emphasized the importance of using locally produced food to support farmers, strengthen food self-sufficiency, preserve cultural heritage, and build sustainable food systems.

Mozambique

Mozambique presented evidence from a 2024 cost-benefit analysis showing that every US\$1 invested in school meals generates US\$4 in returns its national school feeding programme (PRONAE). The study linked school meals to a 4 percent reduction in school dropout, nearly one additional year of schooling, and significant reductions in anemia and chronic malnutrition. The programme also boosted incomes for family farmers and provided households with indirect financial transfers equal to 13 percent of annual expenditures. These findings strengthened political commitment to expand and institutionalize PRONAE as a full national policy. Mozambique is now advancing decentralization, improving procurement monitoring, and exploring innovative financing and private-sector partnerships to support long-term sustainability.

South Africa

South Africa presented the evolution of its National School Nutrition Programme, which now delivers meals to over 10 million learners daily across primary and secondary schools. The programme is rooted in constitutional commitments to equity and access to education, supported by collaboration across education, health, agriculture, and social development ministries. South Africa also highlighted the expansion to two daily meals in many schools, including breakfast programmes. With the integration of early childhood development into the education sector, an additional five million children aged 0–4 are now part of national nutrition strategies.

Sweden

Sweden shared its long-standing history of universal, free school meals, tracing origins back to 1842 and the legal anchoring of the right to school lunches in the Education Act. Research from Stockholm University demonstrates that school meals significantly increase lifetime income, years of schooling, and health indicators such as height, while reducing socioeconomic inequalities. Cost-benefit studies show returns of 7:1 for the poorest children and 4:1 for the median child. Sweden acknowledged challenges in linking meals to sustainable agriculture, food education, and local production, but highlighted strong societal support for the programme. It also emphasized its role in international cooperation, including projects in Guatemala, as part of efforts to share lessons and strengthen global school feeding systems.

World Food Programme

In closing, the World Food Programme highlighted the importance of evidence-driven policymaking. It called for continued global exchange of lessons on what works and what does not, and encouraged countries to leverage evidence, research, and Coalition platforms to build sustainable, high-quality programmes that transform children's lives.



From left to right: **Prof. Donald Bundy**, Professor of Epidemiology and Development at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and Director of the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition; **Ms. Arlinda da Conceição André de Barros Sumana Chaquisse**, National Director of School Health and Cross-Cutting Issues, Ministry of Education and Culture, Mozambique; **Mr. Saidou Madougou**, Director of the Commission for Education and Science, African Union; **Ms. Cindy McCain**, Executive Director, World Food Programme; **H.E. Dr. Agnes Naa Momo Lartey**, Minister of Gender and Social Protection, Ghana; **H.E. Prof. Bidhan Ranjan Roy Podder**, Adviser, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Bangladesh

4. Sustainable Financing Strategies

This session, co-organised by the Sustainable Financing Initiative, explored how countries are securing long-term, predictable financing for school meals and how innovative instruments, partnerships, and institutional reforms can unlock the resources needed to expand and sustain national programmes. Across all interventions, speakers highlighted that financing is fundamentally a matter of political prioritization, reinforcing Priority 1: making school meals a political and fiscal priority globally and expanding access to sustainable finance, while also supporting Priority 2: moving from commitments to action at country level. The benefits of school meals across multiple sectors justify their inclusion as a core public investment. At the same time, countries emphasized that scaling up requires diversified financing models, strong legislation, transparent systems, and coordination across sectors.

The session also showcased the work of the Sustainable Financing Initiative (SFI) for School Health and Nutrition, which supports governments through fiscal space analysis, costing studies, and technical guidance on mobilizing domestic and external resources. The SFI has produced tools and research on earmarked taxes, debt swaps, climate finance, revenues from natural resource, and blended mechanisms, offering governments a menu of context-appropriate financing options. These efforts contribute to and align with global initiatives such as the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, which aims to help governments reach an additional 150 million children with school meals.

Global Framing – Sustainable Financing Challenges and Opportunities

Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa, Ms. Cristina Duarte, underscored the urgent need to secure reliable and sustainable financing for school feeding programmes worldwide. While the discussion highlighted global relevance, Africa's situation illustrates the scale of the challenge: severe fiscal constraints due to high debt service costs, limited fiscal space, and inefficiencies in public spending. In many countries, large portions of essential sectors such as education and health are financed through external assistance, while debt repayment absorbs significant national resources. This paradox reduces the capacity of governments to invest consistently in human capital programmes, including school meals.

Despite these challenges, the session highlighted a clear roadmap for progress. Strong domestic resource mobilization systems, improved expenditure management including a reduction in leakages, and long-term planning focused on transformation rather than transactions can help governments gradually internalize the full cost of school meals. Home-grown school feeding (HSGF) was emphasized as a macroeconomic tool that stimulates local markets, strengthens the social contract, and enhances state legitimacy. Earmarked Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocations for school feeding, targeted debt swaps developed from a transformational perspective not transactional, increased transparency, a whole government approach and investments in digital systems and procurement standards are critical enablers for expanding fiscal space and ensuring that school feeding becomes a stable, nationally financed priority. Duarte also highlighted how school feeding programmes can help to build trust and state legitimacy in certain countries.

Country Experiences

Angola

Angola is preparing one of the Africa region's most ambitious national school meals programmes, aimed at reaching more than 5 million children. The programme is designed to address high dropout rates, malnutrition, and household poverty, with a strong focus on home-grown procurement. After reviewing international models and conducting national cost analyses, Angola adopted a financing plan of US\$435 million with support from Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Agriculture, fully funded through domestic resources at launch. The programme will begin implementation in 2025 and progressively scale up, prioritizing children aged 3 to 12.

Local agriculture and in particular family farming is central to Angola's model. Procurement from cooperatives, including those formed by women and former military personnel, will increase production capacity, stabilize supply chains, and reduce costs over time. Decentralized implementation through municipalities and decentralized budget strengthens ownership and connects school meals with local development. The Government emphasized the need for nutrition education and capacity-building for cooks and dietitians as critical components for ensuring quality and sustainability.

Benin

Benin presented a mature, multisectoral national programme created in 2017 and now reaching the majority of school-aged children. The programme is strongly anchored in domestic financing, multisectoral approach, political commitment, and community involvement. Over 80 percent of food used in school meals is procured locally, boosting agricultural production and stimulating rural economies. Since its inception, the Government has invested over US\$100 million in the programme, with annual allocations increasing steadily. Currently, 1.4 millions learners receive meals representing a 75 to 80% coverage. WFP recently transferred competencies to the government for the implementation of the programme.

The political will has been essential to mobilize partners such as the Islamic Bank, the Netherlands or ECOWAS. Benin is implementing innovative financing mechanisms, including SDG bonds and strengthened contributions from local authorities. A draft national law to institutionalize the school meals programme is under consideration, aiming to secure long-term budgetary commitments and enhance partner confidence. By aligning domestic resources, local procurement, and strong governance, Benin is positioning itself to reach full national coverage in the coming years.

São Tomé and Príncipe

São Tomé and Príncipe fully nationalized its programme in 2016, transforming it into a universal system covering all children from preschool to ninth grade. The programme represents the country's largest social investment, reaching roughly one-quarter of the population. To ensure sustainability, the Government introduced innovative fiscal measures in 2023, including earmarked taxes on alcohol, tobacco, cement, and other goods. These measures complement direct budget allocations and modest voluntary contributions from better-off families.

The programme contributes to employment, local production, and nutrition. Cooks, gardeners, and cafeteria managers are employed by the state, while new initiatives in poultry, pork production, and seed distribution support dietary diversification and local agriculture. Debt swap mechanisms with bilateral creditors and ongoing international partnerships reinforce the program's long-term resilience. Key challenges include rehabilitating ageing kitchen

infrastructure and reducing reliance on firewood, but São Tomé and Príncipe's comprehensive financing model provides a strong foundation for expansion. In particular, they aim to expand to secondary education.

Senegal

Senegal has significantly expanded its school feeding budget over the past year, quadrupling its investment and extending coverage nationwide reaching now 22%. The Government is finalizing a new 2025–2030 strategic plan that will include legislation to formalize the provision of school meals as a permanent national commitment. The programme is increasingly aligned with agricultural and local development policies to strengthen the home-grown component and is seen as a lever for food sovereignty, women's economic empowerment, and revitalization of traditional crops and food diversification, as well as a cross-cutting tool for nutrition, education, economic development, and climate resilience.

Senegal is also implementing a US\$40 million blended co-financing mechanism, combining concessional loans and grants through partnerships with multilateral development banks and WFP. The Government stressed the need for long-term predictability, system harmonization among partners, and an integrated, multi-sectoral approach.

International Financial Institutions and Partners

Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)

The Inter-American Development Bank is committed to supporting country-led programmes through a combination of innovative financing instruments and technical expertise. The institution has mobilized up to US\$25 billion under the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty to expand lending capacity for social sector investments, including school meals. By the end of 2025, the IADB expects to approve US\$4.1 billion in projects aligned with the Alliance.

The Bank stressed that the priority is not only more financing but smarter, more effective use of existing resources and that financial commitments must be paired with efficient, transparent spending and a focus on greater equity to reach the most vulnerable. Many countries in the region face limited fiscal space, rising debt, and disparities in coverage that leave rural and vulnerable children behind. The IADB is supporting reforms in procurement, monitoring systems, and coordination across ministries, as well as multi-partner financing packages that combine funds from the Bank, donors, and global education initiatives.

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

IFAD outlined how its work, although not focused on direct financing of school meals, strengthens the enabling environment for home-grown models. With 60 percent of its global portfolio now nutrition-sensitive, IFAD supports diverse agricultural production, improved diet quality, and farmer capacity. These efforts improve local food availability and connect small producers to school meal supply chains.

The organization focuses on policy support at the local level, knowledge-building, and innovation. By promoting diversified production, ecological practices, and value addition, IFAD helps ensure that schools can source nutritious, locally grown foods. Challenges remain in procurement rigidity, logistics, and dietary preferences, but the organization contributes to systemic improvements that make school meals more affordable, resilient, and sustainable.

Additional Insights

Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (SNV)

SNV highlighted the importance of securing not just more finance, but the right form of finance across the investment continuum. The organization works with blended finance instruments to mobilize medium-scale investment for climate and agricultural initiatives and pairs this with grant-based programming for small and medium enterprises. Examples include nutrition partnerships in East Africa and agricultural market innovations in Asia.

SNV stressed that school food procurement can act as a market-shaping mechanism: by placing schools at the center of local markets, governments can reduce investor risk, offer predictable demand, and lower financing costs. This approach helps bridge the gap between grant funding and commercial investment, catalyzing sustainable capital for food systems linked to school meals.

Guatemala

Guatemala has a strong legislative foundation for its national school meals programme, established in 2017 and anchored across multiple ministries. The Ministry of Education leads implementation, while the Ministry of Agriculture plays a central role in linking local production with school food demand. Guatemala currently invests approximately US\$160 million annually and expects to more than double this figure to US\$400 million in the coming years. The program's legal framework has been instrumental in strengthening coordination, securing domestic financing, and ensuring continuity beyond political cycles.

Closing Reflections

The session concluded by reaffirming that sustainable financing for school meals requires long-term political commitment, integrated policy planning, and coordinated action across government and partners. Countries demonstrated that domestic financing remains the backbone of sustainable programmes, while innovative instruments — such as earmarked taxes, debt swaps, blended finance, and strengthened local procurement — can significantly expand fiscal space. Development partners emphasized that school meals should be recognized as a strategic investment delivering returns across education, nutrition, social protection, agriculture, and climate adaptation. Participants agreed on a shared call to action: to prioritize school meals within national budgets, align external support with government strategies, and ensure that every child has access to a nutritious meal at school.



Ms. Cristina Duarte, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General



Dr. Liesbet Steer, Chair of the Steering Committee & Senior Advisor, Sustainable Financing Initiative

5. Preparing for the Future: School Meals and Sustainable Food Systems

This session explored how countries are leveraging school meal programmes as powerful entry points to transform food systems and advance climate and environmental goals on the road to the 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Speakers highlighted that the way food is grown, processed, and consumed is no longer sustainable for people or the planet: too many children still go hungry or eat poorly, food production often harms ecosystems, and climate change is making it harder to secure nutritious diets, especially in vulnerable communities. Against this backdrop, school meals emerged as a strategic instrument to drive change at scale — improving children’s nutrition and learning, supporting local farmers, promoting resilience to climate change, and reducing environmental impacts.

Participants underlined that school meals, as public policies largely financed and managed by governments, represent the major share of public food procurement. This gives governments significant leverage to reshape food systems by aligning menus, procurement rules, and cooking practices with nutritional, environmental, and economic objectives. The session showcased how countries are using public food procurement for school meals to stimulate local markets, reduce dependence on imports, promote sustainable agriculture, and pioneer cleaner and more efficient energy solutions. These discussions directly advance Priority 2: moving from commitments to action at country level and Priority 5: empowering cities and municipalities to make progress, as countries and local authorities implement innovative solutions to align school feeding with climate and sustainability goals.

Global Evidence – School Meals for Planetary Health

The Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition presented the findings of a major collaborative effort on “planet-friendly school meals,” which brought together contributions from over 160 authors across 87 organisations. This work helped place food — and specifically school meals — at the centre of global climate discussions, including at COP28, where school feeding featured prominently on the food and climate agenda. The Consortium’s analysis highlights that approximately 70 percent of food procured by governments is for school meals, underscoring the enormous potential of school meal policies to influence how food is produced, traded, and consumed².

The research identified four areas where governments can achieve rapid, short-term impacts: shifting menus towards diverse, local, nutrient-dense and indigenous foods; transitioning to clean and efficient cooking methods to reduce deforestation and emissions; reducing food waste, which contributes substantially to greenhouse gas emissions and unnecessary costs; and embedding holistic food education in curricula to shape children’s dietary preferences and behaviours for life. The Consortium emphasised the central role of public procurement rules in the longer term. By integrating environmental, climate, and socioeconomic criteria into procurement decisions, governments can steer food systems towards more sustainable practices and deliberately support specific actors, such as smallholder and women farmers, through their purchasing power.

² Pastorino, Silvia; Springmann, Marco; Backlund, Ulrika; Kaljonen, Minna; Singh, Samrat; Hunter, Danny; Vargas, Melissa; Milani, Peiman; Bellanca, Raffaella; Eustachio Colombo, Patricia; Makowicz Bastos, Deborah; Manjella, Aurillia; Wasilwa, Lusike; Wasike, Victor; Bundy, Donald AP; the Research Consortium White Paper writing team (2023). School meals and food systems: Rethinking the consequences for climate, environment, biodiversity, and food sovereignty. Discussion Paper. London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17037/PUBS.04671492>

To help governments operationalise these insights, the Consortium is developing a toolkit, with support from philanthropic partners, to inform cost-benefit decisions on menu changes, crop choices, waste reduction, and clean cooking technologies. The toolkit is being piloted in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Ethiopia, with plans for broader rollout. The research agenda is also expanding to examine how school food procurement can promote soil health and regenerative agriculture, and how changes in children's diets can reduce the long-term burden of cardio-metabolic diseases. A forthcoming white paper will further explore the link between early dietary patterns, long-term health, and economic outcomes, reinforcing school meals as an instrument for both human and planetary health.

Country Experiences: School Meals as Drivers of Food Systems Transformation

Cambodia

Cambodia has institutionalized home-grown school feeding as a national programme and positioned it as a priority within its education and social protection frameworks. The programme is embedded in the Education Strategic Plan, a dedicated School Feeding Policy and Action Plan, and national strategies on social protection, food security, and nutrition, reflecting strong political commitment. A transition strategy agreed with WFP foresees full national takeover of all supported schools by 2028. As a result, the number of meals delivered is projected to increase from 7 million in 2020 to 28 million in 2025 and 56 million by 2028.

Cambodia's approach aligns school meals with food systems transformation at multiple levels. Nationally, the programme generates evidence on its impacts, including evaluations and a return-on-investment study estimating that every dollar invested in home-grown school feeding yields a four-fold return through improved education and food systems outcomes. The programme supports stable markets for local farmers, promotes sustainable agriculture, creates jobs—especially for women—and improves children's dietary habits. Regionally, Cambodia hosted the first Southeast Asia School Meals Coalition Summit in 2024, catalyzing commitments on nutrition standards, financing, and policy priorities, with follow-up leadership by other countries in the region. Globally, Cambodia is an active member of the School Meals Coalition, engaging in research, financing, and advocacy.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia presented its large and expanding programme, which currently reaches around 8 million children with two meals per day and aims to achieve universal coverage for approximately 21 million pre-primary, primary, and middle-school learners by 2030. The government has allocated substantial national resources, with roughly 90 percent of financing coming from the public budget, demonstrating strong domestic commitment. Implementation is decentralized, with major cities such as Addis Ababa providing two daily meals to hundreds of thousands of students and mobilizing significant municipal budgets.

A home-grown approach channels resources directly to smallholder farmers and integrates locally produced crops into school menus. In Addis Ababa, a notable share of the city's grain market is supplied to the programme, and last year substantial transfers were made directly to small producers. These efforts are part of a broader national agenda that connects climate action, food security, and human capital.

Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau is committed to shift from dependence on imported food and externally designed projects towards a model rooted in local production and national ownership. The country has favorable natural conditions, including extensive water resources and fertile soils, but faces constraints in agricultural mechanization and infrastructure. The Ministry of Education is working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and financial institutions to establish cooperatives equipped with machinery that can scale up domestic production and supply national institutions, including schools.

Currently, more than 1,200 schools benefit from canteens, of which around 850 receive support from WFP. While external assistance remains crucial, the government emphasized its intention to build sustainable systems that guarantee food security in schools. Discussions with the World Bank and regional development banks aim to mobilize financing for staple commodities and strengthen supply chains. School meals are recognized as essential for improving education and broader national development, and the government expressed its determination to assume greater responsibility while continuing to work in partnership.

Kenya

Kenya long-standing school meals programme has evolved into a nationally and locally financed safety net. With early support from WFP, the programme has progressively transitioned to government management, with a dedicated budget line that has grown over time. The system combines centralized management with county-led initiatives focused on younger children. In major cities such as Nairobi, central kitchens cook food in controlled conditions and distribute it to schools. This model improves hygiene and nutritional standards, reduces reliance on firewood in urban areas, and ensures hot, timely meals.

Kenya has positioned school meals as a key instrument for climate-friendly and resilient food systems. Following commitments made at the African Climate Summit, the country aims to expand coverage from 2.6 million to 10 million children by 2030. A national scale-up plan includes a revised policy promoting locally produced, diverse, and drought-tolerant foods; an aggregator model to source directly from smallholder farmers; and a national coalition that coordinates government, civil society, private sector, and partners. Kenya is also pursuing a transition to clean cooking in schools, with the expectation that carbon finance generated from reduced biomass use can help sustain the programme. Evidence indicates that reaching 10 million learners would require around US\$280 million annually. The government is committed to prioritizing domestic resources while seeking additional partners and innovative financing to achieve this goal.

Lesotho

Lesotho views school meals as both a social protection tool and a driver of sustainable agriculture, nutrition, and rural development. The country has adopted a revised national policy that prioritizes home-grown school feeding and sets an ambitious target for 80 percent of school meal ingredients to be sourced from local smallholder farmers using sustainable and eco-friendly methods. School feeding committees have been established in every school to oversee service providers and ensure local procurement, while a multi-ministerial advisory board brings together senior officials from agriculture, finance, social development, trade, local government, and the prime minister's office to coordinate policy.

Lesotho has introduced flexible food baskets and menus that can integrate foods produced around schools, and invests in continuous training and support to farmers, including greenhouse construction and regular dialogues with farmer associations. Over time, the programme has transitioned from WFP-supported operations to full domestic funding for basic education institutions, with partners focusing on early childhood centers while the government prepares to assume responsibility there as well. National leadership at the highest level has reinforced advocacy for local production and stronger food value chains. The country nevertheless faces land tenure issues and climate-related challenges, including erratic rainfall, and has responded by increasing meal budget by 57% to ensure sustainable purchasing from smallholders.

Rwanda

Rwanda has rapidly transformed its program from a limited intervention reaching around 900,000 learners into a universal system covering more than 4.4 million children across pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools. The decision to move to universal coverage has been backed by a sharp increase in national investment: the budget grew from US\$6.2 million in 2020 to about US\$100 million today, representing over 18 percent of the education budget.

School feeding is also being used to catalyze local food systems. Rwanda prioritizes locally produced food, creating stable markets for farmers and injecting resources into rural communities. Partnerships with foundations have supported pilots of fortified wholegrain foods, with a view to improve nutritional quality. A national campaign, “Let’s Share Lunch,” mobilizes contributions from parents, communities, and the diaspora, complementing government financing and reinforcing shared responsibility. Rwanda is also experimenting centralized kitchen models, improving food quality and safety, lowering costs, and creating local employment. At the same time, the country recognizes the challenge of reliance on firewood for cooking and has established a Clean Cooking Task Force to drive a transition to cleaner, more efficient energy solutions. Taken together, these measures position school meals as an engine for learning, local economic growth, and environmental protection.

Uganda

Uganda illustrated the paradox of being a food-secure country with fertile land and surplus production, while many learners still attend school without a meal. To address this, the government is finalizing its first national school feeding policy, which aims to transform school meals from a charitable intervention into a strategic investment in human capital and local economies. The policy is closely linked to the Parish Development Model, which channels resources to the lowest administrative level, including significant allocations for agriculture.

The strategy is built on three pillars. First, empowering smallholder farmers through structured market linkages, with procurement prioritizing farmer cooperatives and creating predictable off-take agreements that encourage families to move from subsistence to commercial farming. Second, promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture to ensure that meals support children’s health and development. Third, adopting decentralized procurement models that require schools to purchase food from within their own districts, reducing costs and emissions and keeping value in local communities. Early pilots, including in Karamoja, have shown positive results, with improved attendance and more serious engagement by farmers. Uganda has set a target for at least half of learners to receive a daily meal by 2030 and is seeking partnerships to support implementation of this approach.

Partners Advancing Planet-Friendly School Meals

Novo Nordisk Foundation

Novo Nordisk Foundation's strategic shift from a purely health-focused research agenda to a broader concern with sustainability and cardiometabolic disease led them to prioritize home-grown school feeding. Recognizing that diet-related illnesses are now a leading cause of premature mortality, the Foundation identified school meals as a single intervention capable of addressing multiple challenges simultaneously: nutrition, long-term health, sustainable agriculture, and climate. Initial engagements focused on humanitarian contexts in East Africa, connecting smallholder farmers to school meal markets and supporting cleaner cooking solutions. This has since evolved into support for national programmes in East Africa and India, where the focus is on scale and systemic impact.

The Foundation outlined three main areas of contribution. First, support to programme implementation and refinement, including making procurement systems work better for smallholders, improving market functioning, and enhancing meal quality for long-term health gains. Second, applied research to help governments make more sophisticated policy choices. Third, technology and innovation, including projects that use digital tools and artificial intelligence to monitor the quality of school meals and link innovators and small enterprises to school meal value chains. The Foundation emphasized its commitment as a long-term partner focused on helping programmes achieve both scale and quality.

The Rockefeller Foundation

The Rockefeller Foundation drew on more than a century of investment in food and agriculture and explained how a recent strategic pivot from productivity to dietary quality brought school meals to the forefront of its agenda. The Foundation sought interventions that could shift diets at scale and concluded that school meals offer a uniquely powerful platform — a high-leverage investment capable of addressing multiple development objectives simultaneously. The Foundation emphasized that while coverage is important, the nutritional quality and diversity of meals are critical, and that new tools now make it possible to measure and improve menu quality.

Work supported by the Rockefeller Foundation focuses on sustainable local sourcing, diversified menus, and simple transformative changes such as substituting refined grains with fortified whole grains, which can improve health outcomes at equal or lower cost. The Foundation also promotes school-based demonstration farms and gardens, which serve as hubs for agricultural extension and community learning. Finally, it supports efforts to build state capability and reduce leakage and corruption by sharing best practices and strengthening governance. In all these areas, school meals are seen as a vehicle to align health, education, agriculture, and climate objectives.

Closing reflections – World Food Programme

The session underscored that school meals are no longer perceived solely as a social or educational intervention, but as a strategic instrument for transforming food systems and advancing climate and environmental goals. Countries are using school meals to drive demand for locally produced, diverse, and nutritious foods; to support smallholder and women farmers; to promote cleaner cooking; and to educate a new generation on sustainable diets. Research and philanthropy are providing frameworks, evidence, and tools that help governments make informed choices and maximize the impact of every meal served. As the world moves towards COP30, school meal programmes stand out as practical, scalable, and politically resonant pathways to deliver benefits for children, communities, and the planet.



H.E. Ms. Irere Claudette, Minister of State for Education, Rwanda



H.E. Dr. Chan Sophea, Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Education, Cambodia



6. School Meals as Strategic Safety Nets: Building Resilience and Human Capital

This session highlighted how governments are embedding school meals within national social protection systems to strengthen resilience, reduce vulnerability, and invest in human capital during crises, conflict, climate shocks, and economic instability. This approach addresses Priority 2: moving from commitments to action at country level and Priority 1: making school meals a political and fiscal priority globally.

Country examples demonstrated that school feeding is no longer seen solely as a nutrition or education intervention. Rather, it is a strategic pillar for protecting children, stabilizing communities, and enabling long-term development. Programmes showcased during the session reduced household expenses, increased school attendance and retention, improved nutrition, supported girls' education, and generated employment, particularly for women working in school kitchens, gardens, and supply chains.

Countries emphasized that school meals act as a stabilizing force during emergencies, restoring a sense of normalcy and dignity even in the most difficult circumstances. Strong political commitment, legal frameworks, inter-ministerial coordination, community co-responsibility, and domestic financing are central to ensuring that school meals become a permanent national safety net. Collectively, the examples reaffirmed school meals as a cost-efficient and high-impact instrument for human development.

Country Experiences: School Meals as Essential Social Protection

Belize

Belize has rapidly expanded its school feeding coverage after school closures during the COVID 19 pandemic. What began as a pilot for nine hundred students in 2022 has grown into the National Healthy Start Feeding Programme serving more than 15,000 learners, representing twelve percent of primary and thirty-three percent of secondary students. The government allocates US\$1.50 per child per day (BZ\$3), reaching seventy-eight schools with free, nutritious meals.

The programme prioritizes healthy local foods, capacity development for cooks, and integrated nutrition education through school garden initiatives coordinated with agriculture and health ministries. It also reduces household expenses and provides formal employment for more than three hundred cooks, most of them mothers. In 2024, the Cabinet approved the first School Food and Nutrition Policy, grounded in the rights to food, nutrition, health, and education. Belize aims to scale coverage and institutionalize the programme, drawing lessons from countries such as Brazil and working closely with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Pan-American Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WFP.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso faces conflict, internal displacement, and a very young population, with more than forty percent under fifteen. School canteens serve as essential safety nets that keep children in school during crisis and support community resilience. The government invests approximately US\$300 million (18 billion CFA) every year in school meals. Despite decentralization challenges, national authorities have reinforced leadership to ensure consistent service delivery.

A flagship innovation is the “One school, one crop, one school farm” model, which integrates agriculture, nutrition, and education. Schools cultivate fields and gardens that feed learners and teach agricultural skills, responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Community councils, including parents and local leaders, participate in the management of the canteens. Many schools are already providing daily meals using locally grown foods, and the government aims to expand to multiple meals per day. This endogenous model strengthens self-reliance and reflects Burkina Faso’s broader cultural and economic approach.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

In the Democratic Republic of Congo too, school meals a critical social protection tool. A new National School Feeding Strategy for 2025–2030 was validated this year, establishing multisectoral coordination across education, health, agriculture, finance, and budget ministries. With WFP support, the country reached 900,000 children in 180 schools in 2023 and expanded to complementary schools the following year.

Given insecurity in the east and recurrent climate shocks, the strategy prioritizes rural and emergency zones. When schools cannot operate, take-home rations ensure continuity. School gardens and community fields act as practical learning spaces, teaching children about nutrition, agriculture, hygiene, and responsible food use. Financing is the main challenge. The government is working with communities, parents, women’s associations, the private sector, and partners to diversify funding sources, including innovative national and international mechanisms. The long-term vision is for every school canteen to drive equity, strengthen local agriculture, and contribute to peace and human development.

Honduras

Honduras presented a comprehensive national programme that reaches more than 1.3 million children, covering ninety percent of educational institutions. Implemented with WFP and coordinated with the social development and education ministries, the programme is central to the country’s social protection system. It is based on six pillars: local procurement, sustainable and culturally appropriate meals, school retention, improved nutrition and cognitive development, climate adaptation, and continuity of service.

Dropout rates have fallen from 1.7 percent to 0.7 percent. A pilot “fresh meals” initiative, supported by WFP and the Rockefeller Foundation, supplies fruits and vegetables to 173 schools and strengthens local producers. Challenges persist due to food insecurity, poverty, climate vulnerability, fiscal pressure, and reduced external financing. Nonetheless, Honduras reaffirmed its commitment to expand and sustain school meals as a strategic investment in resilience, equity, and human development.

Peru

Peru, by placing its national programme established in 2012, is part of a broader State policy on social development to 2030. It now reaches more than four million students in 67,000 across rural, urban, Indigenous, and border areas. By placing the programme under the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, has institutionalized school feeding as a core social protection measure supporting wellbeing, nutrition, education, and equal opportunities. The programme now reaches more than four million students in 67,000 across rural, urban, Indigenous, and border areas.

While logistical operations function at scale, Peru noted the need to strengthen shared responsibility, community monitoring, and local procurement from family farmers. Evidence generation remains essential for national expansion of home-grown approaches. The pandemic also strengthened Peru's adaptive capacity, making school meals a flexible social protection instrument during emergencies. The country was recognized in the 2024 State of School Feeding report for successfully maintaining services when schools were closed. Peru continues to advance multisectoral coordination among education, health, agriculture, and production ministries and welcomes South-South cooperation to accelerate progress.

Somalia

Somalia is recovering from decades of conflict that severely weakened public services. Primary school enrolment, previously at twenty-four percent, is now approaching forty percent, and the number of out-of-school children has fallen from five million to three million. School feeding is central to sustaining this progress. With partner support, Somalia reached 217,000 children over the past two years and has adopted a national policy and a five-year transformation plan aiming for universal primary coverage by 2030.

For the first time, domestic financing will appear in the national budget in 2026. The country is also expanding co-financing through partnerships with finance, agriculture, local administrations, parents, business actors, and international partners, including through debt swaps and blended mechanisms. Challenges remain due to recurrent droughts, food system shocks, and insecurity, but political commitment is strong, and the government expects to move from ten percent coverage today to universal access by 2030.

Ukraine

Ukraine presented school meals as a core investment in human capital at a time of war. Despite attacks on infrastructure, the country is advancing a national reform launched five years ago, bringing together the education, health, and agriculture ministries to modernize school nutrition. Today, more than one million learners in grades one to four receive healthy meals, and the government plans to expand coverage to three million students by 2026. Key priorities include modernizing kitchens, upgrading equipment, and training 6,000 cooks within the next two years.

Conflict has forced Ukraine to construct underground schools to keep children safe while maintaining educational and nutrition services. Efforts also focus on shifting parental habits toward healthier diets, supported by nationwide communication campaigns. The reform is coordinated by a small national team that has maintained continuity, showing that even under extreme circumstances, it is possible to deliver daily nutrition and stability through schools.

Closing Reflections - Finland

Finland concluded by sharing how school meals, in their own history, helped post-war recovery and created a more equal society. Today, every child in Finland receives a nutritious, publicly funded daily meal, reinforcing child health, learning, and social cohesion. The session demonstrated the power of national leadership when school meals are embedded across sectors, strengthen children's rights, and contribute to peacebuilding and resilience.

Leadership examples from Belize, Burkina Faso, the DRC, Honduras, Peru, Somalia and Ukraine, show how school meal programmes can adapt to crisis, strengthen local economies, empower farmers, safeguard education, and support human capital formation. As co-chair of the Coalition, Finland reaffirmed its commitment through political, technical, and financial support, including US\$13.5 million (€12.5 million) for 2023–2025. The session closed with a call to champion school meals as a global public good and a promise to every child.



H.E. Mr. Oscar Requena, Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Belize



From left to right: H.E. Mr. Ville Tavio, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, Finland; **H.E. Mr. Farah Sheikh Abdulkadir**, Minister of Education, Culture and Higher Education, Somalia; **H.E. Mr. Jacques Sosthène Dingara**, Minister of Basic Education, Literacy, and the Promotion of National Languages, Burkina Faso; **Mr. Edem Adamanov**, Deputy Minister of Health, Ukraine; **H.E. Ms. Fanny Montellanos Carbajal**, Minister of Development and Social Inclusion, Peru; **H.E. Ms. Raïssa Malu**, Minister of National Education and New Citizenship, Democratic Republic of the Congo; **H.E. Ambassador Cindy Larissa Rodríguez**, Vice Minister of International Cooperation and Promotion, Honduras; **H.E. Mr. Oscar Requena**, Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Belize

7. The Power of Cities and Municipalities: Driving Innovation and Accountability at Local Levels

This session showcased how cities are becoming pivotal actors in advancing nutritious, sustainable, and equitable school meal programmes. Through the Cities Feeding the Future initiative, Champion Mayors and municipal leaders demonstrated that local governments have unique levers to transform food systems, scale innovation, and strengthen accountability. Their examples illustrated how cities bring together procurement, infrastructure, community engagement, food education, and social protection, turning school meals into powerful instruments of local development. The session linked directly to Priority 5: empowering cities and municipalities to make progress and reinforced Priority 2: moving from commitments to action at country level.

Cities Feeding the Future Initiative: Global Momentum for Local Leadership

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)

The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Secretariat emphasized the growing role of cities in leading food systems transformation around the world. With more than 330 Mayors committed to the Pact, urban leaders are leveraging a wide range of policy tools: urban and peri-urban agriculture, wholesale market management, food aid systems, and food waste prevention. Among these, school meals emerged as the most influential lever for driving nutrition, sustainability, and social equity.

The Cities Feeding the Future initiative, launched at the first School Meals Coalition Summit in 2023, operates through three pillars: advocacy, exchange of best practices, and research. Champion mayors, including those from Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Copenhagen, Nairobi, Milan, Seoul, and São Paulo, offer models that inspire others. These cities, together with all MUFPP signatories that have a school meal programme, contributed to the enrichment of the Coalition's Global Database developed by the Data and Monitoring Initiative, with city-level data. This shows how, even within the same country, cities can experience different challenges, leading to a diverse kind of support needed.

MUFPP presented the new case studies developed together with the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition on Milan's school meals programme, outlining a dedicated and scalable template to support cities in mapping and analyzing their school meals systems.

The Milan case study shows how Milan has built one of the world's most innovative public school meal services. School meals in the city date back to 1900 and today serve 77,000 children daily through a complex network of central, neighborhood, and satellite kitchens. Under the Milan Food Policy, school meals have become the city's primary driver for sustainable food systems and nutrition. Milan achieved a 36 percent reduction in food-related emissions between 2015 and 2024, far surpassing its 2030 target, while cutting red meat purchases by 81 percent and increasing plant-based proteins ninefold. 64 percent of its ingredients now come from organic suppliers. These results were powered by sustainable procurement, redesigned school menus, behavioral nudging in canteens, and strong engagement with families and teachers. While challenges remain, particularly in increasing children's acceptance of legumes and new recipes, Milan's model demonstrates how innovation, evidence, and community participation can transform school meals at scale.

The MUFPP Secretariat also presented a major collaboration with ASEAN, funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The initiative engaged twenty-nine cities across eight countries and produced two key outcomes: an executive training programme for city officials from ASEAN member states, and six detailed feasibility studies. These outputs are now enabling cities to advance the quality and sustainability of their school meal programmes, demonstrating the value of international cooperation for strengthening municipal capacity and the replicability of these actions.

Champion Mayors Debate: Local Innovation in Action

Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Belo Horizonte presented an innovative solution to a common challenge: ensuring access to nutritious food during school holidays, when children lose their main source of daily meals. The city provides food baskets to vulnerable households during school breaks. Using an inter-departmental approach and digital vouchers redeemable at supermarkets, the programme preserves dignity, avoids queues, and ensures families can access food safely and efficiently. A team of nutritionists designed the basket contents, and data systems identify families most in need. Today, the programme supports 35,000 households and reaches more than 80 percent of low-income families. Belo Horizonte's model illustrates how local administrations can create human-centered, efficient safety nets that extend beyond the school year.

Fortaleza, Brazil

The Mayor of Fortaleza shared the Municipality's comprehensive effort to rebuild municipal education infrastructure and improve learning conditions across a network of 630 schools serving 270,000 students. Upon taking office, the Municipality launched broad reforms: full renovation of schools, substantial improvements in climate control, and significant investments in staff working conditions.

A complete menu redesign aligned with national guidelines now ensures balanced, culturally appropriate meals sourced from local farmers. The Mayor highlighted that the school meal programme benefits not only children but also teachers and administrators, strengthening cohesion within school communities. Fortaleza has also expanded evening food support for vulnerable families, complementing school meals with broader social assistance. These initiatives have already lifted tens of thousands of residents out of poverty. In addition, Fortaleza joined the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, reinforcing its commitment to sustainable food systems and city-level leadership.

Commitments and Next Steps for Cities Feeding the Future

The MUFPP Secretariat highlighted a series of commitments to strengthen municipal leadership within the Coalition and strengthening multilevel food governance:

- expanding the library of case studies on Champion Mayors,
- enriching the Coalition's Global Database with detailed city-level contributions,
- supporting ASEAN cities to implement feasibility studies,
- organizing additional national and regional dialogues, beginning with Indonesia,
- delivering new rounds of executive training for cities,
- announcing a new cohort of Champion Mayors at the Global Forum of the Milan Pact in October.

Closing Reflections

Brazil underscored how local governments are critical to the future of school meals. Municipalities are the point where policies become reality, where distribution systems operate, and where schools, markets, community kitchens, and families intersect. Brazil's experience in building the Sustainable School Network across Latin America and the Caribbean shows the transformative impact of local-national collaboration. Speakers emphasized that mayors, because they are closest to communities, are uniquely positioned to act with sensitivity, speed, and precision.

The session closed with a call to strengthen multi-level governance, deepen cooperation across national and municipal systems, and ensure that cities continue to serve as engines of innovation. City leadership is essential for advancing equity, sustainability, and the right to nutritious meals for every child.



From left to right: **Mr. Filippo Gavazzeni**, Head of Secretariat, Milan Urban Food Policy Pact ; **Ms. Darklane Rodrigues**, Secretary of Food and Nutritional Security, Belo Horizonte ; **Ms. Serena Duraccio**, Officer of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Secretariat ; **Ms. Ottavia Pieretto**, Officer of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Secretariat ; **Mr. Evandro Sá Barreto Leitão**, Mayor of Fortaleza

8. Delivering on the Commitment: Governments and Partners Advancing School Meals for Every Child

This session highlighted how governments, civil society, and international partners are joining forces to translate the Coalition's vision into concrete progress for children. Building on the momentum since the first Global Summit in Paris, speakers reflected on the advances documented in the 2024 State of School Feeding Worldwide report and underlined that achieving universal access to school meals will only be possible through strong, coordinated partnerships. The discussion placed children's experiences at the center, showcased national efforts to expand and strengthen school meals programmes, and reviewed how civil society is delivering on the Call to Action launched in 2023 through the [Joint civil society statement ahead of the 2nd Global Summit of the School Meals Coalition](#).

The session also showcased how coalitions created at the UN Food Systems Summit are now working together to drive food systems transformation. Through national examples, child-led research, and reflections from indigenous leaders, participants stressed that school meals must be inclusive, culturally appropriate, and rooted in the rights and dignity of every child. These efforts reinforce Priority 2: moving from commitments to action at country level and Priority 6: prioritizing high-level participation and advocacy, as governments and partners commit to scaling programmes and sustaining momentum toward 2030.

Children's Voices and Child-Led Research

A key feature of the session was the presentation of findings from a child-led research initiative, "The Child Now," implemented in 13 countries. Through a video and an intervention by a young researcher from Fortaleza, the voices of more than one thousand children were brought into the Summit. Children described what school meals mean in their daily lives and how they affect their ability to learn, grow, and feel respected.

The adolescent researcher emphasized that children want to be actively involved in shaping policies and programmes, not just as beneficiaries but as partners. She stressed that good quality meals help children concentrate, stay in school, and feel valued, and called on political leaders and authorities to listen to children's perspectives and improve school meals accordingly. Her message was clear: children see school meals as a right and expect to be heard when decisions are made about their food.

Government Leadership and Partner Support

Haiti

Haiti presented school canteens as a critical tool for improving nutrition, learning, and local economic development. The presence of both the agriculture and education ministers at the Summit signaled the high priority given to school meals. The government has adopted a local procurement model that directs significant resources every month to domestic food production, combining family farming with more structured agriculture to strengthen crops, livestock, and vegetable supply.

Efforts include technical training for farmers, investment in water resource infrastructure, and support for micro-entrepreneurs and start-ups that improve production, storage, and distribution linked to school canteens. As a result, the national programme reaches well over one million students and is expanding coverage. Haiti works closely with partners such as FAO, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, WFP, and bilateral agencies to sustain and scale the programme. The country called for more predictable financing that bridges humanitarian and development budgets and underlined the value of South-South cooperation, particularly with Brazil. School meals were presented as a shared responsibility, bringing together government, communities, and partners to protect children and support farmers.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe described school meals as mandatory and central to its vision for quality education. The programme covers more than 8,000 primary schools and benefits around 3.6 million learners, with direct funding from the Ministry of Finance. Approximately US\$5 million is allocated annually to ensure that every child from early childhood development through grade seven receives at least one hot, nutritious meal each school day. Political commitment is strong and visibly supported by national leadership.

Implementation relies on school business units and a whole-of-government approach that engages agriculture, health, and social partners. Parents and learners are involved in growing vegetables, and the government has drilled thousands of boreholes and supported village business units that supply fresh produce to schools. When the country faced an El Niño-induced drought, emergency supplies of maize and rice were distributed to protect children's access to food. Zimbabwe collaborates with WFP, UNICEF, and global education partners to reinforce the programme and is drawing inspiration from Brazil's experience. School meals have improved attendance, retention, punctuality, and academic performance, as children come to school knowing they will eat.

Civil Society Delivering on the Call to Action

Civil society organizations reported back on the Call to Action launched at the first Global Summit. A network including Catholic Relief Services, the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, the International Parliamentary Network for Education, Mary's Meals, Plan International, the SUN Civil Society Movement and World Vision has been working to strengthen government-led school meal programmes and elevate civil society's role as a strategic partner.

Examples from multiple countries illustrated this contribution. In Viet Nam, civil society supported the expansion of school meals to kindergartens, created school nutrition gardens, and upgraded kitchen infrastructure, resulting in measurable improvements in child nutrition. In Kenya, organizations have linked women entrepreneurs in agriculture to schools, improving diets, school attendance, and local livelihoods. In Honduras, work with the Ministry of Education has contributed to better literacy outcomes. Civil society also engages in budget analysis, advocacy, and strategic litigation to improve transparency, reduce illegal fees, and reinforce accountability, as demonstrated by initiatives such as Elimika Bora in Kenya.

The civil society representative stressed that school meals programmes succeed when governments and civil society work together from the outset, co-designing programmes that reflect local realities. She encouraged governments to reduce barriers to participation for smaller organizations, invest in joint advocacy and research, and recognize that “feeding children is everyone’s business”: governments provide the mandate and framework, while civil society can bring technical expertise, proximity to communities, and innovation.

■ Reflections from Partners and Coalitions

World Vision International reflected on the journey since the first Global Summit, noting how much has been achieved collectively and how the latest State of School Feeding data demonstrate tangible progress. The organization highlighted the power of starting with children’s voices, the importance of government leadership in countries such as Haiti and Zimbabwe, and the central role of Brazil’s experience as a reference for many programmes. The message was that planning together with civil society and communities from the beginning leads to stronger, more sustainable school meal systems.

In the last segment of the session, the Director of the School Meals Coalition Secretariat at the World Food Programme connected the Summit’s discussions to a broader intergenerational responsibility. She reflected on more than two decades of work in school meals and stressed that the current generation has a moral duty to do better for children in the face of climate change and environmental degradation.

In a dialogue with the Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Indigenous Peoples’ Food Systems Coalition, the conversation turned to the importance of indigenous food systems and cultural identity. The conversation underscored that indigenous food systems are sustainable, regenerative, and deeply rooted in respect for nature. Integrating indigenous foods and knowledge into school meals can help children feel proud of who they are, strengthen cultural identity, and teach sustainable practices. The Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues invited governments to work with indigenous communities so that future Summits can showcase school meal programmes that are culturally appropriate and grounded in indigenous knowledge.

Closing Reflections - France

France closed the session by reaffirming that results will only be achieved through strong partnerships and inclusive approaches. Collaboration with the United Nations and civil society has enabled more children to benefit from school meals. Home-grown and homemade food, including indigenous practices, need to be valued within school feeding systems.

Looking ahead, France called for stronger multilateralism and multisectoral approaches that connect education, health, agriculture, and social protection — precisely the type of integrated work that school meals can anchor. France reiterated its pride in supporting the School Meals Coalition and its network of civil society partners across many countries. The closing message was clear: school meals are not only a public policy instrument, but they are also a social and political commitment to give every child the chance to learn, grow well, and participate in building societies that are more resilient, innovative, and rooted in their communities.



Ms. Davila, Adolescent Researcher; H.E. Mr. Vernet Joseph, Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development, Haiti; **Ms. Dana Buzducea**, Vice President for Advocacy and External Relations, World Vision International; **H.E. Prof. Mr. Torerayi Moyo**, Minister of Primary & Secondary Education, Zimbabwe; **Ms. Haydee Diaz**, Catholic Relief Services and Representative of the Civil Society Organization Network



Ms. Aluki Kotierk, Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems Coalition; **Ms. Carmen Burbano**, Director of the School Meals Coalition Secretariat & Director of School Meals and Social Protection, World Food Programme

9. The Way Forward

The Second Global Summit of the School Meals Coalition reaffirmed a shared global commitment: school meals are one of the most powerful investments a country can make in its children, its economy, and its future stability. Over two days in Fortaleza, governments, cities, civil society, development partners, researchers, and young people presented compelling evidence and concrete action demonstrating how school meals have become a strategic priority across education, health, food systems, climate resilience, and social protection agendas.

The Summit marked a pivotal moment of expansion for the Coalition: 23 new member states and regional bodies joined, alongside 46 new partners, bringing the Coalition to 111 member governments and 150 partners. New members span Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific, and Europe — from Belize, Djibouti, Ghana and Guinea-Bissau, to Indonesia, Jordan, the Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Uruguay, Yemen, and regional bodies including the Economic Community of West African States, the Southern African Development Community, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries. Their membership demonstrates growing confidence in the Coalition as a driver of national progress and global collaboration.

Leaders also witnessed the launch of two major public goods: the State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024 and the updated School Meals Coalition Global Database. The State of School Feeding 2024 report revealed an unprecedented 466 million children reached globally, highlighting not only the scale of investments made but also the need for sustained support to low-income and crisis-affected contexts. The expanded Global Database, guided by the Coalition's Data and Monitoring Initiative, strengthens transparency and accountability, providing a trusted platform for comparable data on school meal coverage, financing, and programme quality.

The Summit saw over 40 governments submit new national commitments, bringing the total to 66. These commitments were accompanied by nearly 50 Voluntary National Reviews, demonstrating growing accountability and alignment with the Coalition's objectives. The Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition presented its 4th annual research statement, highlighting strong evidence that school meals are a foundational investment in human capital, and committing to continue value-for-money analyses, case studies, and decision-support tools with governments.

Cities also emerged as central actors in the school meals ecosystem. Through the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and its Champion Mayors showcased innovative city-led approaches to healthy, sustainable school food systems — from Milan's plant-forward procurement shifts to Belo Horizonte's dignified food basket programme and Fortaleza's newly launched school feeding model. The city of Fortaleza also joined the Milan Pact and the initiative, demonstrating expanding mayoral leadership.

Partners advanced their contributions across multiple fronts. The Coalition's Sustainable Financing Initiative announced plans to support countries not only in developing financing strategies but also in implementing them. World Vision and partners launched the child-led research project School Meals in Our Words, amplifying testimonies from more than 1,000 children across 13 countries. The Civil Society Network presented a detailed progress report following its 2023 Call to Action and endorsed new Joint Commitments for the next two to three years to strengthen inclusive, government-led school meal systems. Meanwhile, the Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems Coalition called for greater recognition of cultural food practices, traditional knowledge, and environmental stewardship in school meal programmes.

Looking Forward

As the Coalition moves toward the next phase of action, member states and partners outlined a forward-looking agenda:

- School meals will be further integrated into national policies and decision-making processes, recognizing them as essential social and economic investments. Momentum will focus on reaching 150 million additional children by 2030, building on the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty and outcomes from the Nutrition for Growth Summit.
- Collective learning and knowledge-sharing will remain central. Coalition Initiatives will continue to provide technical assistance, facilitate peer exchange, and advance research to help countries tackle bottlenecks in design, implementation, and monitoring.
- International Financial Institutions will play an expanding role, supporting governments to overcome fiscal constraints and scale sustainable, home-grown models. Collaboration with these institutions — and innovative financing mechanisms — will be critical to unlocking investment at the scale required.
- Local mobilization will be prioritized. Civil society organizations, municipalities, and regional networks such as the Sustainable School Feeding Network (RAES) will continue to strengthen national systems through technical expertise, community engagement, and multisectoral partnerships.
- Advocacy and visibility will expand across major global platforms, including the African Union, G7, G20, UN General Assembly, and UN climate negotiations (COP31). The Coalition will continue highlighting the cross-sectoral benefits of school meals — from education and nutrition to gender equality, local economies, and climate resilience.
- The World Food Programme will continue to host the Secretariat, supporting strategic direction, coordination, and engagement across the Coalition.
- The Coalition will reconvene at its Task Force Ministerial Meeting in 2026 and at the Third Global Summit in 2027, providing key moments for reviewing progress, renewing commitments, and strengthening partnerships.



