School Meals Coalition

School Meals Coalition Achievements Paper

During the School Meals Coalition Task Force Ministerial meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya, in October 2024, six priorities were agreed for 2025-2026. Two years on, the Coalition takes stock of what was achieved.



1 | Make school meals a political and fiscal priority globally and expand access to sustainable finance

Governments are strengthening the financial sustainability of school meals, increasingly treating them as a domestic policy priority rather than a donor-funded intervention. The *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024* estimated that investments in school meals reached US$84 billion annually, an increase of around US$36 billion compared to the previous edition, with 99 percent financed through national budgets.

Governments are also engaging finance and other sectors ministries, development banks, and new global financing platforms to diversify and strengthen the resources available for school meals. The **Sustainable Financing Initiative**, led by the Learning Generation Initiative of the Education Development Center is enabling this progress through working with 16 governments on the financial sustainability of their national school meals programme. These collaborations have led to the development of country sustainable financing strategies for school meals, evidence-based cross-sectoral budgets, influence of school meals policies, influence of donors and increased domestic budget allocation. The Sustainable Financing Initiative is now also supporting governments to broker partnerships and to implement their strategies.

2 | Move from commitments to action at country level

Since the Task Force Ministerial meeting in 2024, the Coalition has added eight countries and three regional bodies, reaching 113 governments, six regional bodies, and over 160 partners.

Coalition countries have significantly increased the number of children receiving meals from 261 million to 294 million. Seventy-one governments carry national commitments comprising 563 actions, and 107 now have a school meals policy in place. This is most evident in the increase in school meals policy in low- and middle-income countries. Governments extended coverage towards universal targets, scaled local procurement, and used peer exchange and regional networks to move faster. Additionally, school meals are now often supported by complementary health and nutrition activities, such as handwashing with soap. In 2025-2026, 50 Coalition countries have also submitted voluntary progress reviews against their commitments, further strengthening country-led accountability and transparency on implementation.

3 | Strengthen evidence for better decision making and more cost-efficient programmes

Governments are using stronger evidence to inform policy and investment decisions on school meals. Evidence from value-for-money studies shows returns of US$7–35 for every dollar invested. Systematic reviews also place school meals among the most impactful and cost-effective interventions across multiple sectors: with significant returns not only to education access and learning, but also to such diverse aspects as health, planetary health, social protection, agriculture, local employment and gender. A key development is the recognition by governments of school meals as an investment in the creation of human capital and the success of future generations.

Governments are drawing on this growing evidence base to strengthen dietary policy, identify locally sustainable operational practices, and establish national baselines to monitor success. The Coalition's **Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition** has enabled this progress with the support of a "think tank" of more than 1,500 researchers and policy advisers across 137 countries and by mainstream publishing of more than 100 peer-reviewed studies of good practice.

4 | Measure results and report on the Coalition's progress



Governments have transformed how school meals progress is measured and reported, building a stronger global evidence base for decision-making and accountability.

The *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024* was published, the School Meals Coalition Global Database was launched, and school meals coverage was incorporated into the SDG 4 'Quality Education' framework. This foundation is now being strengthened through the new Government Self-Reporting System for School Meals, delivered by the **Data and Monitoring Initiative (DMI)**, in collaboration with the Research Consortium and the African Union, which enables governments to report annually on children reached, investment, policy status and complementary activities through a harmonized global framework. The first reporting round is underway in 2026–2027. Together, these advances are giving countries the tools to track progress, identify gaps and demonstrate the growing scale and impact of school meals worldwide.

5 | Empower cities and municipalities to make progress

Governments are bringing school meals delivery closer to communities, with national authorities setting the policy framework and municipalities increasingly leading implementation. Countries are devolving responsibilities to municipal entities to unlock local procurement, ensuring efficient food safety control and establishing decentralized school feeding committees, enabling shorter supply chains and stronger oversight closer to schools. In many countries, municipalities are financing and managing school meals directly within national standards.

The **Cities Feeding the Future Initiative** is enabling this shift, which connects 266 municipalities across 71 member countries and provides regional exchange, technical training and city-level feasibility studies to turn local ambition into action, as well as national dialogues involving cities and ministries to bridge the gap between national and local governments. Data from 156 cities are now captured in the School Meals Coalition Global Database, strengthening visibility of different priorities across local contexts. The initiative also identified a second cohort of 'Champion Mayors', city leaders that are pioneers in the field of school meals and as political ambassadors submit concrete time-bound pledges through the School Meals City Commitment Letters.

6 Prioritize high-level participation in the Global Meeting of the School Meals Coalition in Brazil in 2025 and support additional gatherings to promote advocacy

Governments have sustained high-level political momentum for school meals and increasingly translated it into collective commitments, regional cooperation and action across wider policy agendas. The Coalition is enabling governments to sustain momentum, connect regional efforts and turn political commitment into collective action. At the Second Global Summit, hosted by Brazil in September 2025, countries adopted an Outcome Statement and submitted 49 Voluntary Progress Reports, strengthening mutual accountability for delivery. Governments have also carried school meals forward through successive G20 and G7 presidencies, the UN Food Systems Summit Stocktaking, the Nutrition for Growth Summit, Africa Day of School Feeding and the High-Level Political Forum, while bringing the agenda into emerging areas of policy through COP30, including climate- resilient food systems and clean cooking in schools.



Regional platforms have reinforced this momentum, including the Community of Portuguese Language Countries International Seminar on School Feeding, and regional convenings across East Africa, Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and West Africa. This cooperation is translating into concrete outcomes:

7

WEST AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS COMMITTED TO STRENGTHENING HOME-GROWN SCHOOL MEALS FOLLOWING A 20-COUNTRY CONVENING

8

SOUTHEAST ASIAN GOVERNMENTS ENDORSED A REGIONAL OUTCOME STATEMENT AND AGREED TO ESTABLISH A REGIONAL NETWORK

20+

EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS CALLED FOR GREATER INVESTMENT

1st

NATIONAL CHAPTER OF THE COALITION STRENGTHENED COLLABORATION BETWEEN EAST AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS

What comes next?

The next phase is to turn this momentum into lasting national systems: stronger evidence and data to track progress; predictable, sustainable multi-year financing; resilient infrastructure and supply chains; and policies that can withstand fiscal pressures, shocks and emergencies.

Governments must lead by setting clear national targets, embedding school meals in long-term policies and budgets, strengthening monitoring and accountability and sustaining and deepening progress where coverage remains lowest. As urbanization accelerates, national and city governments must work together to ensure school meal programmes reach children in both urban and rural communities. They must also ensure that expansion delivers quality, equity and stronger outcomes for children.

The Coalition will support this leadership, through its initiatives and partners, by helping countries translate commitments into implementation plans, mobilize sustainable financing and partnerships, strengthen data systems and peer learning, support school meals in emergency contexts and share evidence and practical solutions across regions.

Partners, including donors, development banks, UN agencies, civil society, and researchers should align their resources and expertise behind country priorities, close financing, data and capacity gaps, support continuity of school meals during emergencies and help build resilient systems that can endure beyond individual projects or funding cycles.

The upcoming global meetings provide critical opportunities to turn ambition into action. The Global Summit in 2027 should secure renewed political commitments, measurable national targets and the financing needed to accelerate delivery. The Ministerial Task Force meeting in 2028 should review progress against these commitments, address remaining gaps and hold governments and partners accountable for implementation, while setting the next biennium priorities for the Coalition. Together, these milestones should move the Coalition from demonstrating that school meals can scale to ensuring that every child has access to a healthy, nutritious meal in school.

Learn more about the School Meals Coalition:
schoolmealscoalition.org

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