

## Chapter 2

# The School Meals Coalition – a global movement for school meals



The President of Kenya and the delegates of the School Meals Coalition Task Force after the opening ceremony of the Second Ministerial Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya. WFP/Arete/Edwin Nyamasyo

The School Meals Coalition was launched by 46 countries at the UN Food System Summit in September 2021, under the leadership of Finland and France. It was created in response to the COVID-19 crisis, when almost all countries closed their schools, leaving 370 million schoolchildren without access to the one meal a day they could rely on (WFP, 2020a). Brazil joined as co-chair of the Coalition in 2023. Since its creation, the School Meals Coalition has become one of the most successful initiatives of recent times.

Through an increasingly complex and powerful political network of action, representing more than 60 percent of the world's population, the School Meals Coalition is a continuously evolving experiment that has created a new multilateral and multisectoral model of collaboration for the twenty-first century. This is especially important at a time when long-standing paradigms are being challenged and reinvented, including the role of Official Development Assistance.

The School Meals Coalition focuses on the concrete and shared purpose of ensuring that all children have access to a daily, nutritious meal in school by 2030. This global goal is then translated by each government into multisectoral domestic commitments reflecting diverse national contexts, political realities and needs. In many cases, these commitments have already been translated into large-scale, meaningful results (some of which are showcased in this chapter).

The design of the School Meals Coalition explicitly incorporated concepts of systems theory and thinking. It aims to create a culture of collaboration among countries by fostering an environment where every government can both share its experiences and learn from others, breaking outdated dichotomies of global north and global south, or donor and recipient dynamics between countries. Instead, the Coalition is a space where every country, regardless of its income level or geographical location, has something to contribute, resources to share, a willingness to receive support and take inspiration from others.

At the heart of the Coalition's success is its innovative model of distributed leadership. By helping to create and empower networks of partners that do not depend on one agency, one partner or one stakeholder alone, the Coalition has orchestrated a more efficient, decentralized way of supporting governments to make progress. Through this expanding ecosystem, the Coalition's secretariat and initiatives help to inspire, encourage and orchestrate action.

Measuring the results of this systemic approach is challenging, not least because it is difficult to attribute or connect a specific result to a specific action. Some results are also difficult to measure or monitor in any centralized way, e.g. the extent to which political will has been created; the number of connections that have been made within the Coalition's network to create productive partnerships that deliver results; or the extent to which connecting countries has led to more knowledge being shared and how it has been put into practice.

Over the coming years, the Coalition's secretariat will explore how to refine measurement of its systemic approach and how to usefully report on what is happening within this network of networks. This will be supported by specialized partners, focusing on studying and developing systemic leadership practices.

It is important to do justice to and recognize the work and contributions of the individuals, communities, governments and partners that make up the Coalition's ecosystem and, with their collective action, are making it so successful. This Chapter presents the current results and existing quantitative and qualitative information, illustrating the value that has been created by the School Meals Coalition through this new collaborative model.



First Global School Meals Summit in France, 2023 with left to right: H.E. Ihor Kuzin; Deputy Minister of Health of Ukraine; H.E. Ms Alexis Taylor; US Undersecretary of Agriculture; H.E. Dr Dulce Soares; Minister of Education; Timor-Leste; H.E. Ms Yasmine Sherif, Executive Director, Education Cannot Wait; H.E. Ms Isabel Maria Correia Viegas de Abreu; Minister of Education; Culture and Science; São Tomé and Príncipe; H.E. Mr Jean-Luc Mouthou; Minister of Preschool; Primary; Secondary Education and Literacy; Republic of Congo, Mr Robert Jenkins; Director, Education and Adolescent Development; UNICEF. WFP/Rein Skullerud

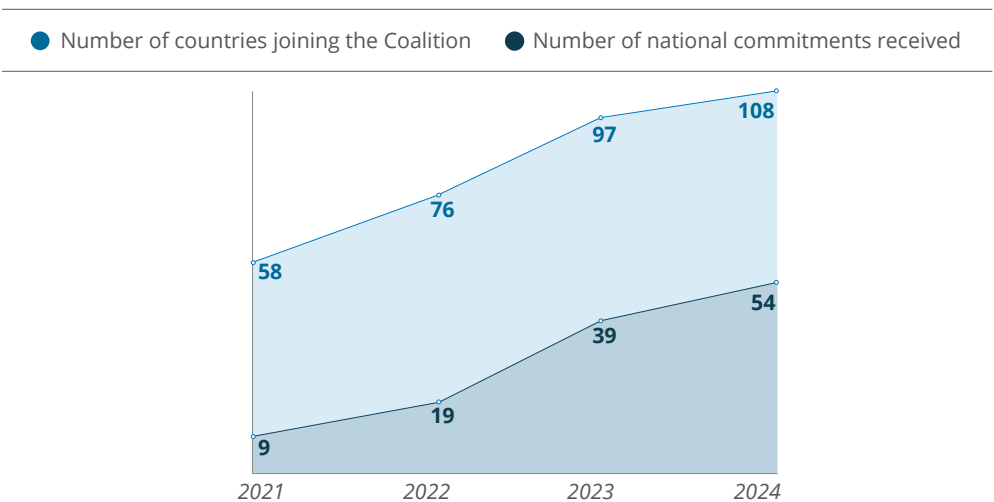
## 2.1 The School Meals Coalition: governments making unprecedented progress supported by partners

At the time of writing, the School Meals Coalition has united more than 100 governments from all income levels, six regional and subregional bodies, and over 140 diverse partners from civil society, academia, think tanks, foundations, UN agencies and the international financial institutions that support them – reflecting the Coalition’s truly global reach. The Coalition benefits from an exceptionally high level of sustained political support, with guidance from a task force of ministers and regular engagement from presidents and heads of state. The Coalition’s overarching goal is to expand the scale and quality of school meal programmes globally as a means to address several interconnected challenges in education, nutrition, food systems and inequality, as well as challenges caused by disasters and shocks.

As countries join the Coalition, they are encouraged to issue domestic commitments that form the basis for country progress and for subregional, regional and global collaboration efforts. At the time of writing, 54 national commitments have been submitted to the Coalition. Figure 2.1 illustrates the number of countries that have joined the School Meals Coalition, when they joined and those that have submitted commitments.

**Figure 2.1**

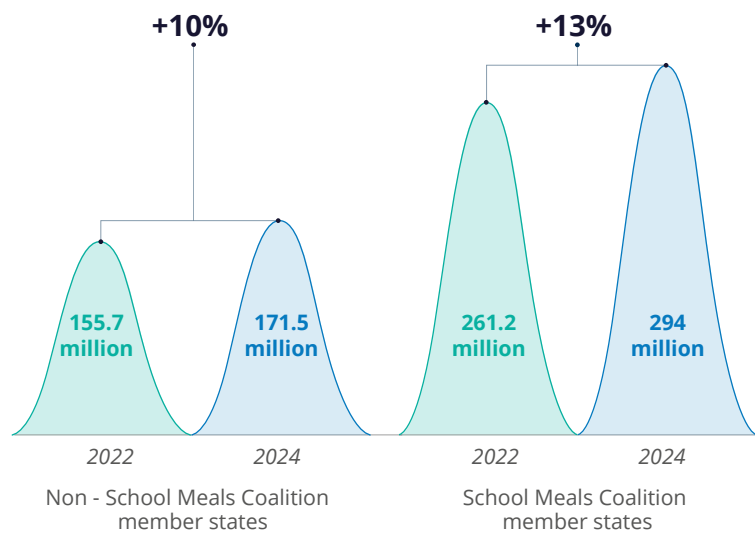
Number of countries joining the School Meals Coalition by year and commitment submission



The data presented in Chapter 1 revealed that, since 2022, approximately 32 million additional children are being supported by school meals in countries that are members of the School Meals Coalition. This represents an increase of approximately 13 percent, outpacing the 10 percent expansion in school meal provision for non-Coalition countries. Similarly, reported investment in school meals has increased by US\$11 billion in Coalition member countries, representing a 45 percent increase, compared to a more moderate 35 percent increase for non-member countries. Finally, the five countries (Ukraine, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Senegal and China) that have adopted new school meals policies since the last edition of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* are all members of the School Meals Coalition.

**Figure 2.2**

Total number of children receiving school meals in School Meals Coalition member states versus non-member states, *State of School Feeding Worldwide* 2022 and 2024 (in millions)

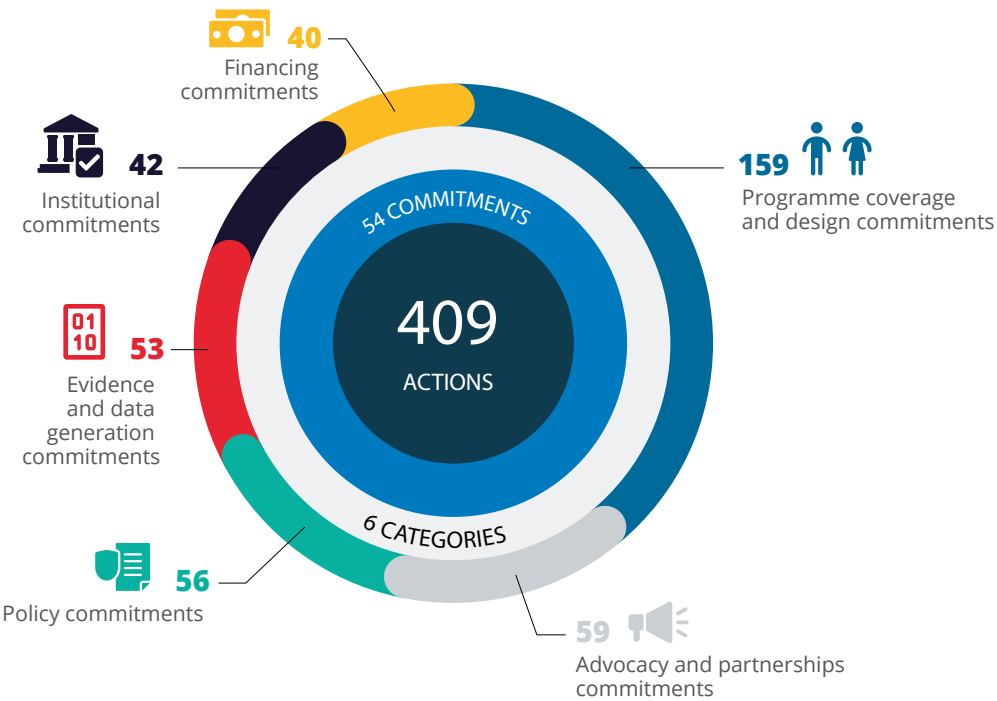


Sources: School Meals Coalition, direct government data, GCNF Global Surveys, WFP (estimates, Annual Country Reports) and World Bank (2018).

Beyond the scale-up of school meal programmes, countries are also committing to improving the quality and sustainability of their programmes. Through their national commitments, Coalition member countries committed to 409 actions across six categories: policy, financing, institutional, programme design and coverage, evidence and data, and advocacy and partnerships.

**Figure 2.3**  
National commitments to the School Meals Coalition, broken down by categories

**54** national commitments,  
**409** actions across six categories



Source: School Meals Coalition secretariat.




Among the Coalition member states that have submitted national commitments, most have set specific targets and timelines – establishing clear benchmarks for progress. Concrete, effective commitments attract more support from partners, furthering government efforts and ambitions.


Depending on the national context, state of the national school meal programme and needs, commitments can vary – ranging from establishing a foundation to create a national school meal programme, to committing to well-designed and universal school meals. Table 2.1 provides examples of commitments per category.





**Table 2.1**

Examples of national commitments to the School Meals Coalition

Category		Examples
 <p><b>Policy commitments</b></p>	<p>Commitments in this category ensure that national school meal programmes are prioritized in national and sectoral plans, policies, strategies, laws or other legal frameworks.</p>	<p><b>Benin</b> committed to adopting and disseminating a school feeding law by 2025, ensuring the financial stability and sustainability of the National Integrated School Meal Programme.</p> <p><b>Iraq</b> committed to implementing a national school meals policy by 2023 and establishing a school feeding law by 2025.</p> <p><b>Tanzania</b> committed to including school meals in the National Food and Nutrition Policy by 2027 as a strategy to promote good nutrition among school-aged children.</p>
 <p><b>Financing commitments</b></p>	<p>These commitments include (i) national commitments to establish a dedicated budget line for the national school meal programme or (ii) international commitments towards supporting programmes in other countries that do not have the necessary resources.</p>	<p><b>Sri Lanka</b> committed to establishing a sustainable financing initiative by 2030, featuring a cross-sectoral ministerial budget line for its school meal programme and increasing the annual allocation from US\$61 million to US\$204 million.</p> <p><b>Chad</b> committed to increase funding each year by 15 percent from 2024.</p> <p><b>Germany</b> has supported school meal programmes in different countries and contexts to improve the nutritional situation of children and their families. A notable example is the Accelerating School Meals project, a five-year, EUR22 million initiative in support of home-grown and climate-sensitive school meals in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Sierra Leone.</p>
 <p><b>Institutional commitments</b></p>	<p>These commitments include strengthening institutional capacities and coordination skills to lead and deliver school meal programmes at all levels, such as commitments to establish standards and plans, for example nutrition guidance, as well as multisectoral working committees or working groups.</p>	<p><b>Lesotho</b> committed to form a high-level school feeding steering committee chaired by the Principal Secretary of Education and Training, comprised of principal secretaries or senior officers from the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Social Development, Local Government, Trade, Cabinet (Food &amp; Nutrition Coordination Office) and development partners.</p> <p><b>Iraq</b> committed to establishing an inter-ministerial coordination committee on school meals by 2024, and to creating entities and coordination mechanisms that are empowered, adequately staffed, have the necessary capacity and are well-funded by 2026.</p> <p><b>Tajikistan</b> committed to developing and endorsing a transition plan from WFP's School Feeding Development Project (funded by development partners) to a national school meal programme funded from government budget.</p>

Category		Examples
 <p><b>Programme coverage &amp; design commitments</b></p>	<p><b>Subcategory 1: Programme coverage commitments</b></p>	<p>This category invites commitments aimed at increasing the reach of school meal programmes. Of the 54 commitments, more than 30 countries have made specific commitments around increasing coverage.</p>
	<p><b>Subcategory 2: Programme design commitments</b></p>	<p>Commitments in this category are about improving the quality of national programmes according to the national and local context, needs and gaps.</p> <p>For instance, they specify the percentage of food to be purchased locally from smallholder farmers as part of a national law/policy; linking school meal programmes to at least four other multisectoral interventions; or making school menus more nutritious.</p>
		<p><b>Sri Lanka</b> and <b>Benin</b> both committed to reaching universal coverage by 2026.</p> <p><b>Kenya</b> committed to reaching universal coverage by 2030.</p> <p><b>Tajikistan</b> committed to reach more than 50 percent of primary students with school meals by 2027.</p>
		<p><b>Guinea</b> committed to using 80 percent of local produce in school canteens by 2030.</p>
		<p><b>France</b> committed to serving 50 percent sustainable products and at least 20 percent organic products in national school meals.</p>
		<p><b>Luxembourg</b> committed to promoting 0 km food and short-distance purchasing, and committed to combatting food waste and plastic pollution in school canteens by adapting meal offers, selling leftover food at reduced prices, setting up drinking fountains and avoiding single use plastic.</p>
		<p><b>Lesotho</b> has mandated sourcing 80 percent of food commodities for school meals from local smallholder farmers, emphasizing eco-friendly farming practices, food safety, nutrition and health.</p>
		<p><b>Tajikistan</b> committed to upgrading 100 percent of school canteens with modern tools and infrastructure by 2027.</p>



Category	Examples
<div data-bbox="181 350 247 439">  </div> <div data-bbox="172 462 361 586"> <p><b>Evidence and data generation commitments</b></p> </div> <div data-bbox="398 382 634 666"> <p>Commitments on evidence and data generation can include country efforts to generate evidence and improve data collection, analysis and dissemination and ensure its integration into policy and decision making processes.</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="668 234 1123 363"> <p><b>Sri Lanka</b> committed to implementing a digitalization strategy and tool that will allow the National School Health Policy to be monitored at all levels (school/provincial/national) by 2026.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="668 382 1123 538"> <p><b>Rwanda</b> committed to support and build connections between national academic institutions and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, government and other relevant initiatives related to school meals research and learning.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="668 557 1123 814"> <p><b>Burundi</b> committed to finalize its school feeding impact evaluation, cost-benefit/value-for-money studies and assessment of the nutritional status of school-aged children by the end of 2025; and to mobilize stakeholders, including ministries, universities, donors and local administrations, to undertake an informed policy and funding review to implement recommendations from the studies.</p> </div>
<div data-bbox="181 896 269 959">  </div> <div data-bbox="172 974 361 1070"> <p><b>Advocacy and partnerships commitments</b></p> </div> <div data-bbox="398 891 618 1148"> <p>This category calls for commitments around high-level advocacy that aim to elevate the profile of school meal programmes, highlighting their multisectoral benefits at national, regional and global levels.</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="668 852 1137 1033"> <p><b>Honduras</b> committed to strengthening partnerships with international development organizations, multilateral organizations, the UN system, civil society, academia and the private sector, aiming to increase the financial and technical support needed to implement its national school meal programme.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="668 1052 1137 1186"> <p><b>Suriname</b> committed to having at least two relevant ministers and two relevant experts represent the country in School Meals Coalition ministerial meetings and to advocate for healthy, nutritious meals in the region.</p> </div>

Several member states also explicitly outline their ambitions to work with the School Meals Coalition’s global initiatives and partners, leveraging expertise, data and innovative financing mechanisms to overcome challenges and accelerate progress.

Nearly half of the governments that have submitted national commitments expressed their commitment to regional and international engagements, highlighting countries’ dedication to peer-to-peer support and (South-South triangular) cooperation. For instance:

- **Uganda** committed to participating and engaging in regional and global School Meals Coalition activities to share experiences and learn about best practices.
- The **United States** has shown commitment to working with Coalition members, building on contributions and lessons learned from the U.S. McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, to help ensure that every child is well nourished and receives a quality education.

Children play football in a refugee camp in Chad. World Vision/Amy Van Drunen



## 2.2 A new collaborative model: how the School Meals Coalition works and its networks

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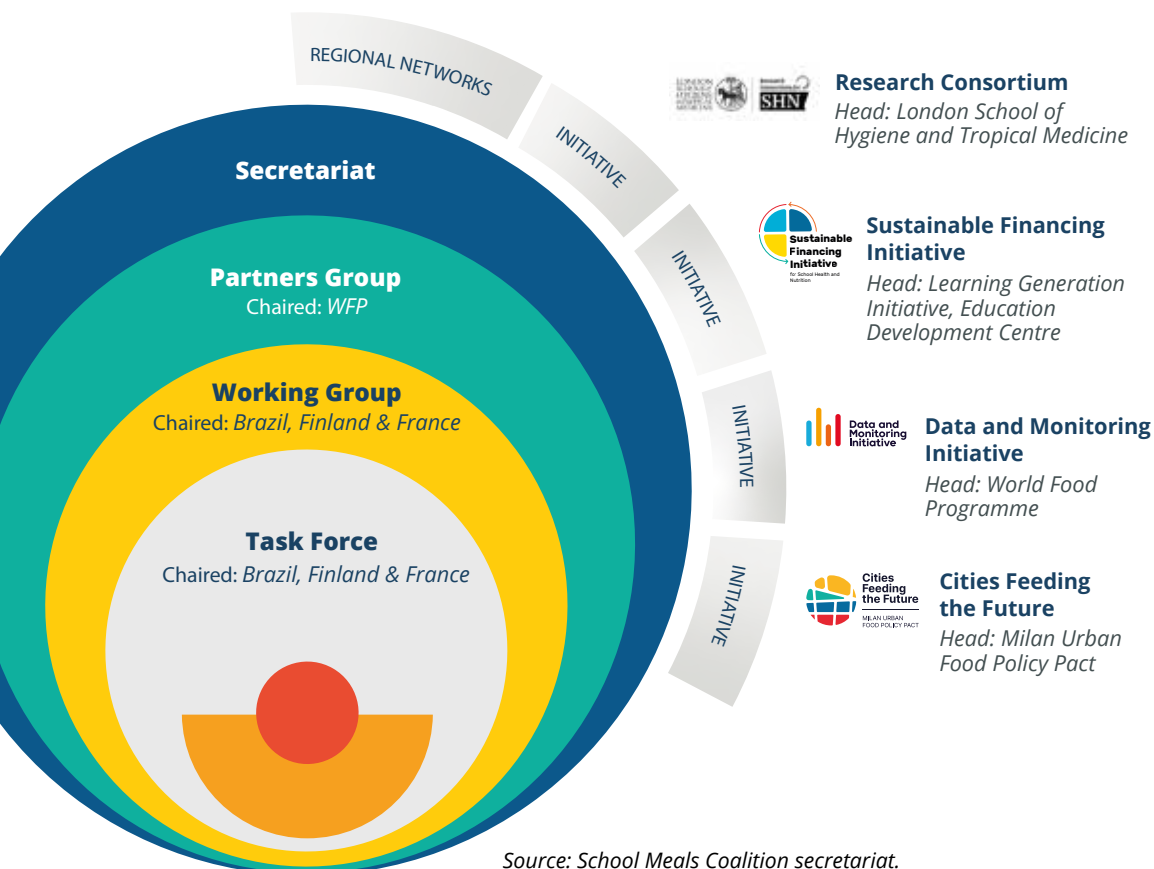
A commonly used definition of the word “coalition” is: an alliance of different states, organizations or people who agree to act together to achieve something. Another interesting definition is: a group that is formed to undertake an enterprise beyond the resources of any one member. Both definitions are useful to define the School Meals Coalition.

The School Meals Coalition is a voluntary, collaborative partnership framework created by governments, for governments, in which they share good practices, optimize cooperation and support each other to scale up their school meal efforts.

At the global level, the School Meals Coalition has three main bodies and a secretariat that make up its nimble and flexible structure. The Coalition also includes four initiatives that support countries, which are themselves vast networks of partners and countries (see Figure 2.4).

**Figure 2.4**

How the School Meals Coalition works



**The School Meals Coalition Task Force** is led by the Coalition co-chairs (currently Brazil, Finland and France) on a rotational basis, and is made up of focal points from each of the leading member countries. The Task Force is the Coalition's decision making body: it determines the Coalition's overall strategic direction; sets yearly priorities; provides guidance and leadership to the work of the secretariat and the initiatives; and leads on political advocacy and positioning. Current members of the Task Force are: the African Union, Brazil, Finland, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden and the United States. The Task Force meets virtually every two months and in person at the ministerial level every other year. The inaugural meeting took place in Helsinki in October 2022 and the second took place in Kenya in October 2024. These ministerial meetings serve as crucial opportunities to endorse the Coalition's priorities for the biennium (see Box 2.1 for more details on the Ministerial Task Force Meeting in 2024 and the Coalition's priorities).

## Box 2.1

### The Second Ministerial Meeting of the School Meals Coalition's Task Force

The Second Ministerial Meeting was hosted by the Kenyan government and took place in Nairobi, Kenya on the 29 October 2024.

Participants included all 12 members of the task force and special invitees from Norway, the Rockefeller Foundation, Novo Nordisk Foundation, the Global Partnership for Education, the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.

H.E. Dr William Samoei Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya, delivered the keynote address, furthering Kenya's commitment to scaling school meals to reach 10 million children by 2030.

During the meeting, the task force endorsed six priorities for the School Meals Coalition for 2025–2026, which were outlined in the resulting Outcome Statement:<sup>1</sup>

- 1. Make school meals a political and fiscal priority globally and expand access to sustainable finance:** Advocate for school meals as a high-impact investment in human capital and growth, identify a set of influential champions, engage ministers of finance in this discussion and engage international financial institutions at the highest levels to address the challenges of positioning this agenda as a global priority. Help countries explore options to mobilize domestic and external finance to expand fiscal space, fill funding gaps and transition to self-reliance. Strengthen the Sustainable Financing Initiative to lead on this priority and ensure robust collaboration with the Global Alliance Against Poverty and Hunger.
- 2. Move from commitments to action at country level:** Encourage countries to accelerate the scale and quality of their school meal programmes by connecting them with suitable partners, providing assistance and fostering peer-to-peer engagement. Support the launch of the new initiative of the School Meals Coalition to provide demand-led, strategic technical assistance to low and lower-income countries for sustainable, national programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> [Leaders Statement Kenya TF Meeting 29 October 2024\\_29.10.24.final.pub.pdf](#)

- 3. Strengthen evidence for better decision making and more cost-efficient programmes:** Document best practices and the value for money of sustainable national school meal programmes, and inform government policy decisions through the annual Research Statement and Showcase of Evidence produced by the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition.
- 4. Measure results and report on the Coalition's progress:** Support the launch of the biennial *State of School Feeding Worldwide* report which summarizes global progress; report on the new SDG 4 indicator on school meals coverage and strengthen indicators to measure progress on school meals at the global level through the new Coalition database; and enhance the availability and accessibility of high-quality data on financing, national school meal programmes, school meals in urban contexts and complementary activities through the Data and Monitoring Initiative.
- 5. Empower cities and municipalities to make progress:** Prioritize support at the subnational level, through the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, mobilizing a cohort of champion mayors/subnational leaders to improve their programmes through targeted support, sharing of experiences and advocacy.
- 6. Prioritize high-level participation in the next Global Meeting of the School Meals Coalition in Brazil in 2025 and support additional gatherings to promote advocacy:** These gatherings include South Africa's G20 Presidency, Canada's G7 Presidency, the 10th Africa Day of School Feeding, Second Food Systems Stocktaking Moment, Nutrition for Growth Summit in Paris, Summit of Social Development/United Nations General Assembly, COP 30 and regional School Meals Coalition meetings.



**The Working Group:** The School Meals Coalition's Working Group is the larger and fully inclusive forum that encompasses all the Coalition's member countries. The working group is co-chaired by Finland, France and Brazil, and is a broad platform for information-sharing; dissemination of best practices and country experience; establishment and mobilization of further partnerships and alliances between countries and with other partners; and sharing of expertise and institutional support. Coalition members meet virtually every two months and every other year at the ministerial level through the School Meals Coalition Global Summits. The first Global Summit was organized in France in 2023 (see Box 2.2 for more details on the Paris Global Summit). The second global summit will take place in Brazil in 2025.

### **Box 2.2**

#### First School Meals Coalition Global Summit

The first School Meals Coalition Global Summit was hosted by France in October 2023 in Paris, under the high patronage of the President of the French Republic.

The summit marked the first convening of all Coalition members and presented an opportunity to showcase the mobilization and commitments of governments in favour of school meals. It aimed to align global action and collectively set ambitious objectives for the years to come.

Bringing together high-level political leaders from 66 countries, four regional bodies and 65 partner organizations, the summit marked a pivotal moment for global school meals advocacy. Notable attendees included the President of Honduras.

The event reaffirmed the shared conviction that school meals are a driver of economic, social and environmental progress by supporting goals in education, food security, nutrition, health, social protection, gender equality, agrifood systems and climate action.

During the event, countries, regional bodies and partners presented their past and future efforts and the meeting saw an array of announcements, commitments and outcomes, including:

- Brazil was welcomed as third co-chair of the Coalition alongside Finland and France.
- Nine new member states and partners were welcomed to the Coalition.
- The Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative was launched.
- More than 100 CSOs, led by Plan International and World Vision International, issued a Joint NGO Call to Action on School Meals for adequate funding, strong nutrition standards and independent accountability.

The meeting also served as a launching pad for the School Meals Coalition's engagement in 2024 and beyond. It culminated in an [outcome statement](#), signed by the Coalition's three co-chairs, Brazil, Finland and France.

The next Global Summit of the School Meals Coalition, hosted by Brazil in September 2025, will build on the momentum of the 2023 Summit and continue to drive collective action towards ensuring that every child has access to a healthy meal in school.

For more information on the event, to view the recordings and to read the full summit report, visit the School Meals Coalition's website: School Meals First Global Summit ([schoolmealscoalition.org](https://schoolmealscoalition.org))

**The Partners Group** is chaired by WFP and encompasses all School Meals Coalition partner organizations. Similar to the working group, this is a broad forum for information-sharing, mainly at the technical level. The partners group meets virtually every two months.

**The secretariat** is hosted by WFP through augmented capacity in its School Meals & Social Protection Service at WFP headquarters in Rome. The secretariat serves as the School Meals Coalition's coordinating body, with strategic guidance from the task force. The secretariat helps to articulate how the Coalition ecosystem works, including through outreach to new members; organizing periodic meetings and events; keeping stakeholders informed, empowered and motivated; and helping to connect initiatives and avoid duplication of efforts.

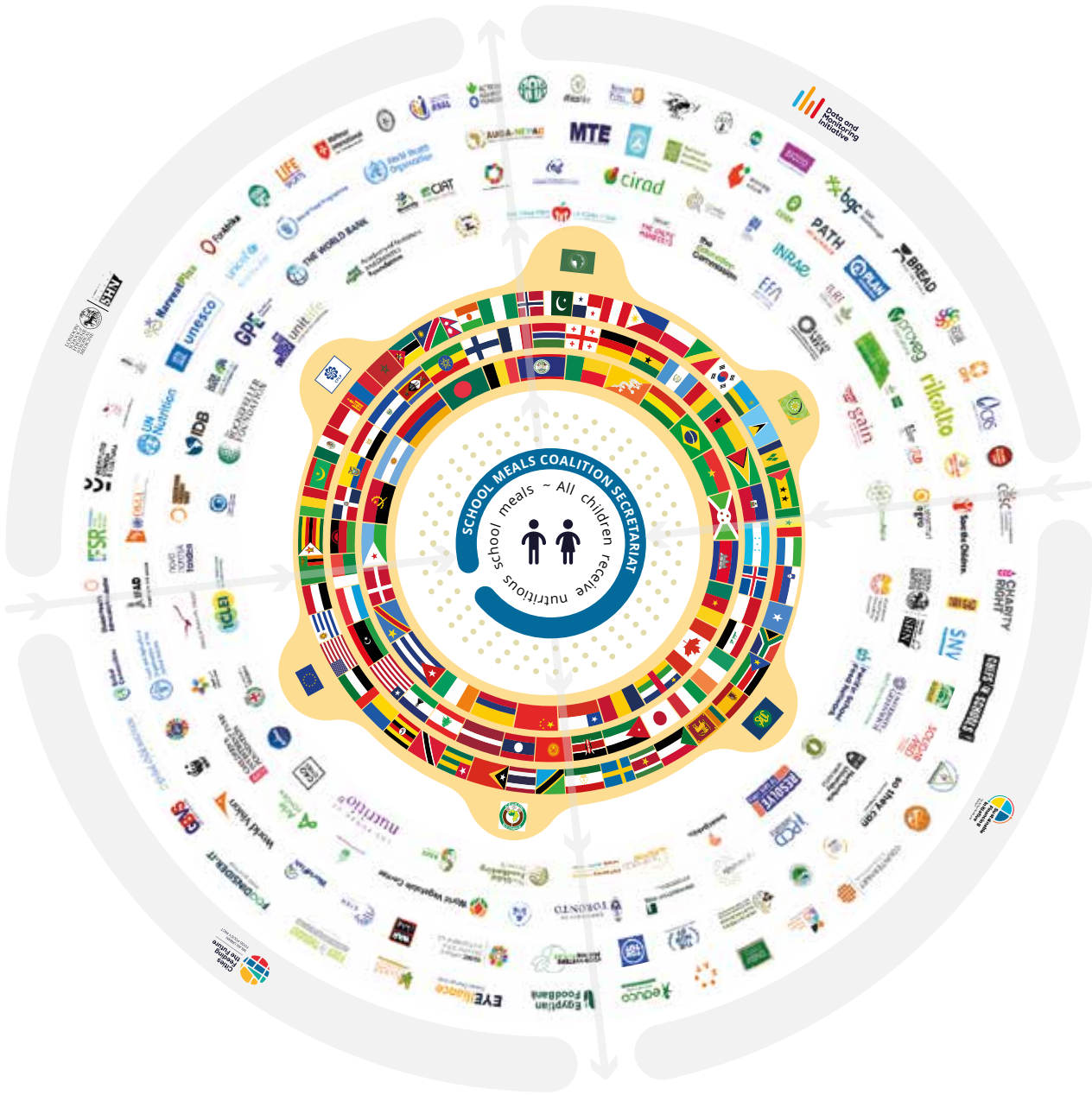
**The following initiatives** were established to support governments with specific needs and challenges connected to their commitments (Section 2.3 below provides more details):

- The **Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition** is hosted by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and coordinates the independent, global efforts of networks of academia, think tanks and research partners. It generates evidence on the design, cost, implementation and impact of school health and nutrition programmes; makes the case for investment; and provides policymakers within Coalition countries with policy and programmatic advice on good practice in school health and nutrition.
- The **Sustainable Financing Initiative** is hosted by the Education Development Centre and explores different ways to support countries with more sustainable sources of financing for school meal programmes. This includes stepping up domestic financing and finding ways of increasing and making funding from donors more efficient and effective.
- The **Data and Monitoring Initiative** is hosted by WFP and coordinates country and partner efforts to develop and sustain a global school meals database and better indicators to track and monitor Coalition actions and accomplishments.
- The **Cities Feeding the Future Initiative** is hosted by the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and shares good practices and knowledge from selected successful cities around the world to help other cities in Coalition countries replicate these models.

**Figure 2.5**

The School Meals Coalition ecosystem: Multisectoral collaboration from local to global

- School Meals Coalition secretariat
- Cities
- Regional bodies and governments
- Partners
- Initiatives



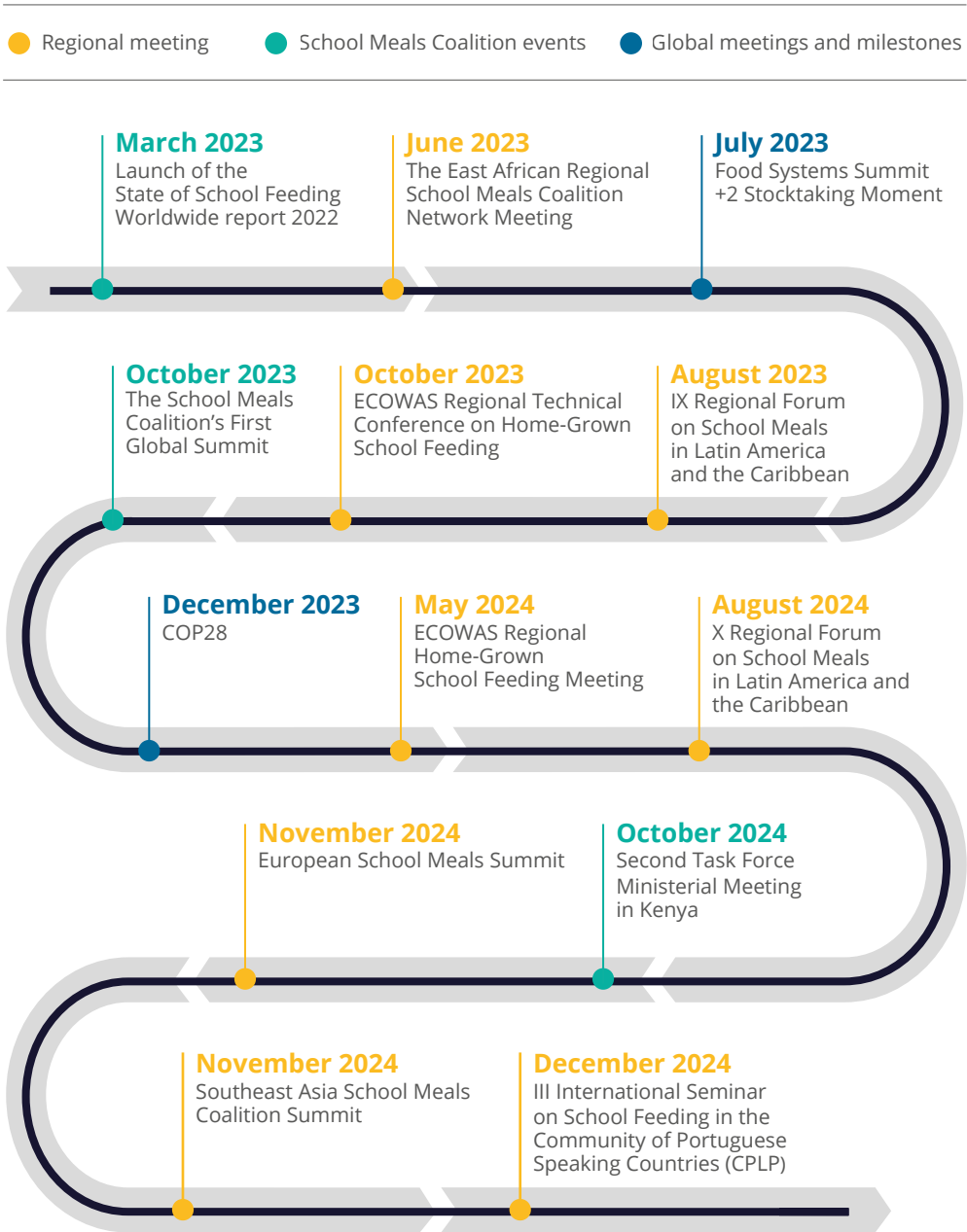
*Disclaimer: This visualization is for illustrative purposes only and does not capture all aspects of the School Meals Coalition. The Coalition is rapidly evolving, so the information shown may become outdated at the time of publication.*

The School Meals Coalition is designed to maximize the ways countries and partners interact with each other; share information, resources and capacities; and through these connections make progress at various levels. In 2023 and 2024, more than 5,000 people participated and helped shape Coalition-related virtual and in-person events, which have further expanded networks and communities of practice. Approximately 110 governments and regional bodies, and 116 partners have been mobilized through various events, which in turn helps to shape public discourse and develop consensus. Figure 2.6 shows the main Coalition-related events that have taken place over the past two years.

WFP Executive Director, Cindy McCain, joins Ministers and other leaders of the School Meals Coalition at the Second Ministerial Meeting of the Task Force of the Coalition in Nairobi, Kenya, 2024.  
WFP/Edwin Nyamasyo



**Figure 2.6**  
School Meals Coalition key events 2023–2024





Through the advocacy efforts of the School Meals Coalition’s members and partners, school meals are now recognized in major global fora, such as COP 28, the G20 – including the Global Alliance Against Poverty and Hunger championed by Brazil’s G20 Presidency – the G7, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the UN General Assembly. Table 2.2 shows the declarations and statements issued by the School Meals Coalition and its members, and also the broader discussions the Coalition has helped to influence.

**Table 2.2**

Declarations issued or influenced by the School Meals Coalition in 2023–2024

2023	<a href="#"><i>8<sup>th</sup> Africa Day of School Feeding Communiqué</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>Empowering the future: ECOWAS homegrown school feeding for human capital development and economic growth</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>G7 Miyazaki Agriculture Ministers’ Communiqué (2023)</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>Paris Statement – First School Meals Coalition Global Meeting</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>G20 New Delhi Leaders Declaration (2023)</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>COP 28 UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action (2023)</i></a>
2024	<a href="#"><i>High-Level Political Forum: Ministerial Declaration</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>Declaration of the Member Countries of the School Meals Coalition: Tenth Regional Forum on School Meals in Latin America and the Caribbean 2024</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>Pescara G7 Development Ministers’ Meeting Communiqué</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>The Global Education Meeting: Fortaleza Declaration</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>School Meals Coalition Task Force Meeting Outcome Statement</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>The Global Alliance Against Hunger &amp; Poverty: Policy Basket on School Meals</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>U20 Rio/ Sao Paulo Communiqué</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders’ Declaration</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>Outcome Statement: Southeast Asia School Meals Coalition Summit</i></a>
	<a href="#"><i>III International Seminar on Best Practices in School Feeding within CPLP - Final Communiqué</i></a>

To reach and engage with its diverse international community, the School Meals Coalition uses various communication platforms to help countries connect and learn from each other. The Coalition's [website](#), relaunched in September 2024, is a hub for global data, research and government actions and has attracted over 24,000 views from 183 countries. The Coalition's mailing list includes subscribers from all member countries, partners and various global, regional and local stakeholders. The mailing list facilitates the dissemination of a monthly newsletter, which now includes 20 editions. Highlights of the work undertaken by countries and partners are shared through social media channels, which saw an 80 percent increase in followers in 2024.

One of the significant developments over the last few years has been how the Coalition has evolved at the regional level. Engagement with regional and subregional bodies has strengthened, expanding from two to six members. Since 2023, regional bodies have organized and hosted eight regional events in four continents, including approximately 80 countries and nearly 800 participants. These events resulted in four regional declarations or statements, which have fed into global discussions (see Table 2.3 for a summary of regional efforts).

Regional efforts offer a valuable platform for countries to exchange best practices, learn from one another's experiences and foster cooperation. By connecting countries within shared geographic, linguistic or economic contexts, these events reinforce and amplify the impact of national commitments, enabling more coordinated and effective efforts.

**Table 2.3**  
Summary of regional efforts

Event	Participants, governments and partners	Main outcomes	Declaration/ Outreach document
2024			
III International Seminar on Good Practices in School Feeding in the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP), São Tomé and Príncipe	43 participants from eight countries and four partners	Resulted in the CPLP joining the School Meals Coalition and saw the establishment of a CPLP Network on School Feeding, Nutrition and Health as a space for regular multilateral dialogue.	<a href="#">III International Seminar on Best Practices in School Feeding within CPLP - Final Communique</a>
Southeast Asia School Meals Coalition Summit, Siem Reap, Cambodia	134 participants from seven governments and 39 partner organizations	<p>Major financial commitments were announced, along with efforts to develop sustainable financing mechanisms (such as blended finance and climate finance) to support scalability and long-term sustainability. Cambodia committed to integrating school meals into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) framework, ensuring its long-term impact as a regional priority.</p> <p>The Philippines was announced as the host of the next regional summit.</p>	<a href="#">Outcome Statement: Southeast Asia School Meals Coalition Summit</a>
European School Meals Summit, Kyiv, Ukraine	88 participants from 24 countries and 14 partners	<p>Positioned school meals as a tool to bridge social divides, build sustainable food systems and drive human capital development.</p> <p>Participants pledged to establish data-driven frameworks and mobilize technical and financial support across national and regional levels.</p> <p>Six Ukrainian municipalities (Kropyvnytskyi, Zhytomyr, Brovary, Zaporizhzhia, Sheptytskyi and Ivano-Frankivsk) joined the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and the School Meals Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative.</p>	n/a

<b>X Regional Forum on School Meals in Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico City, Mexico, 2024</b>	131 participants from 24 countries and 31 partners	<p>Highlighted comprehensive public policies as key to sustainable school meal programmes.</p> <p>Cemented the region's recognition of school meals as a crucial instrument for improving nutrition and to support climate resilience and sustainable food systems.</p>	<a href="#">Declaration of the Member Countries of the School Meals Coalition: Tenth Regional Forum on School Meals in Latin America and the Caribbean 2024</a>
<b>2024 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Stocktaking conference on Homegrown School Feeding, Dakar, Senegal</b>	128 participants from 21 governments and 25 partners	<p>Discussions focused on the financing of costed commitments to home-grown school meals.</p> <p>Saw launch of "ECOWAS Homegrown School Feeding landscape analysis paper".</p>	n/a
<b>2023</b>			
<b>ECOWAS Regional Technical Conference on Homegrown School Feeding, Dakar, Senegal</b>	More than 70 participants from 14 countries	<p>Saw the launch of the Western African regional network.</p> <p>Resulted in ECOWAS joining the Coalition.</p>	<a href="#">Empowering the future: ECOWAS homegrown school feeding for human capital development and economic growth</a>
<b>The Power of Multisectoral Approaches to Human Capital Development, IX Regional LAC Forum, Brasilia, Brazil</b>	200 participants from 25 Latin American countries, and partners from international financial institutions, regional organizations, international cooperation organizations, UN agencies, academia and the private sector	Saw the launch of The <i>State of School Feeding</i> in Latin America and the Caribbean 2022 report.	<a href="#">State of School Feeding in Latin America and the Caribbean 2022</a>
<b>The East African Regional School Meals Coalition Network Meeting, Kigali, Rwanda</b>	39 participants from nine countries and eight partners	Saw the launch of the Eastern African School Meals Coalition Network.	n/a

## 2.3 The School Meals Coalition in action: addressing challenges through global initiatives

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The School Meals Coalition has established four initiatives designed to support countries and partners with specific challenges or needs. The initiatives are themselves networks of partners and amplify the scope, reach and power of the Coalition. Since the launch of the Coalition in 2021, the initiatives have collaborated with around 48 governments and supported exchanges between approximately 100 cities.

### The Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition

#### Objectives

The Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, launched in 2021 as the first Coalition initiative, was established in response to a call from member states for access to evidence-based policy insights on the most effective approaches to national school meal programmes. To this end, the Research Consortium's objectives are to: (i) curate and analyse evidence on the costs and effectiveness of school meal programmes for learning, cognition, social and physical outcomes, to clarify the case for investment; and (ii) translate the evidence into policies and actions which decision makers and parliamentarians can use to develop or strengthen efficient national programmes.

#### How it works

The Research Consortium adopts a deliberately global approach to evidence gathering and dissemination, seeking to ensure that research is developed through a truly international dialogue and is relevant to different national settings.

To achieve this, the Research Consortium co-created a Global Academy of more than 1,100 academics and practitioners from approximately 330 organizations across 110 countries. The research of these academicians is produced through six thematic communities of practice – groups of researchers specializing in discrete areas of school health and nutrition – established to respond to the evidence gaps identified by School Meals Coalition member states.

The Research Consortium also liaises with existing regional and country knowledge hubs to co-create contextually relevant evidence and guidance for Coalition member states. For example: in Africa, through the African Nutrition Society and Federation of African Nutrition Societies; in Asia, through the ASEAN network and the Indian Nutrition Society; in Europe, through the European Union Child Guarantee; in Latin America, through the RAES Sustainable School Feeding Network; and in North America, through the National Institutes of Health. This approach fosters a two-way exchange of knowledge between the Consortium and its stakeholders, where global expertise informs local practice, and insights from on-the-ground experiences shape the broader research and policy agenda.

The work of the Research Consortium is guided by a ten-year research strategy designed to support the School Meals Coalition's goal of ensuring every child has access to a nutritious meal in school by 2030. It is coordinated by a small secretariat hosted at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. The secretariat plays a key role in coordinating global research collaborations and translating data into actionable guidance for policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders across sectors.

### Areas of research focus

The Research Consortium has created six communities of practice to guide research into evidence and policy, with a seventh area under development.

The *Impact & Evidence* Community of Practice carries out systematic reviews of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of school meal programmes, assessing their impact across several outcomes, including learning, physical and cognitive growth, and psychosocial well-being. This included a Cochrane Database systematic review<sup>2</sup> into the impact of school meals on child well-being, the first of its kind in almost 20 years.

The *Analytics & Metrics* Community of Practice conducts national value-for-money analyses of Coalition member states' school meal programmes, estimating the likely returns on investment for governments across four key sectors: health, education, social protection and agriculture. Studies are under way with 14 governments, including eight in sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, the outcomes of the study resulted in a government commitment to expand its national school meal programme from 10 million to 20 million children; in the Philippines, the study is being used as the basis for rethinking the design of the national school meal programme.

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<sup>2</sup> More information about the Cochrane Database systematic review can be found <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/>



The *Good Examples* Community of Practice produces case studies of national programmes, conducted by local research and policy teams using a standardized template. The *Good Examples* Community of Practice aims to complete case studies for all 108 Coalition member states to document how programmes are organized and to identify good practices. There are currently case studies published or under way in 55 countries worldwide. Case studies are also useful for planning programmes in individual countries: for example, in Ukraine, a *Good Examples* case study helped to inform the strategy developed by the national School Nutrition Reform team to reach vulnerable children in Ukraine during the conflict.

The *Nutrition* Community of Practice engages with regional networks of nutrition experts, including the African Nutrition Society, the Federation of African Nutrition Societies, the Indian Nutrition Society and the UK Nutrition Society, to promote understanding of the importance of continued investment in child nutrition beyond the “first 1,000 days” of life, throughout the “next 7,000 days” into childhood and adolescence. It is also collaborating with partners as part of the Coalition’s Data and Monitoring Initiative to identify, for the first time, a common set of nutrition indicators for school-aged children.

In Nepal, a solar energy system powers meal preparation in school. WFP/Biplob Rakhal



The *Planet-Friendly Diets* Community of Practice drives innovation in school meals for improving planetary health, working with Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda to co-create policy-relevant insights. This included the creation of a toolbox to assist the creation of costed plans to help Coalition member countries integrate planet-friendly menus, reduce food waste, optimize clean and energy efficient cooking, and engage in meaningful food education.

The *Food Systems* Community of Practice is actively working to evaluate different pathways for school meals to transform food systems, including through agrobiodiversity, women's empowerment and the promotion of micronutrient rich crops, helping Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal to transform local agriculture through sustainable school meal programmes.

A seventh community of practice, led by partners in Brazil and focusing on the use of artificial intelligence to support programme design, is under development.

A cross-cutting priority across all research areas is the inclusion and cultivation of the talent of early career researchers.

### **Achievements since publication of the State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022**

Since its launch, the Research Consortium has emerged as a hub for school health research and dialogue, publishing more than 30 papers in leading journals; producing a pioneering evidence-based white paper on the relationship between school meals, food systems and climate resilience; developing three Annual Research Statements distilling evidence for Coalition member states; and contributing to global publications such as the Lancet Commissions, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report and the World Bank's Disease Control Priorities. In addition to its contributions to the literature, the Research Consortium has also directly supported School Meals Coalition countries to gain deeper insights into their national programmes. National case studies have either been published or are under way in 55 countries, spanning all income levels, and value-for-money studies have been published or are under way in 14 countries, eight of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.

A key responsibility of the Research Consortium is to ensure research outputs are communicated to school health and nutrition stakeholders. To date, its Global Academy has hosted more than 40 virtual events, attracting over 4,000 experts from more than 100 countries. Members of the Research Consortium have also been invited to speak at over 60 national, regional and international events hosted by other partners, including governments and supranational political unions such as the African Union and European Union. Every October, ahead of the School Meals Coalition Ministerial Meeting, the Research Consortium holds its Annual Showcase, engaging a broad audience (including policymakers, academia, development agencies and civil society). The 2024 Annual Showcase drew an audience of more than 600 participants from 75 countries. To further reach key audiences, the Research Consortium partners with the FAO School Food Global Hub to cross-promote key publications, and with the Inter-Parliamentary Network for Education to share useful research and guidance with parliamentarians.





A teacher in a classroom in Sri Lanka.  
World Vision/Elissa Webster

## The Sustainable Financing Initiative

The School Meals Coalition's Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition is led by the Learning Generation Initiative at the Education Development Centre.

### Objectives

The initiative was officially launched in 2022 to work with governments and development partners to help countries identify multi-year financing opportunities for school meal programmes, with a particular focus on low and lower-middle-income countries. Achieving universal coverage of school meal programmes in these countries would generate multiple benefits for education, health and human development. The Sustainable Financing Initiative's aim is to identify the financing pathways to unlock those benefits. The initiative has a three-pronged approach to achieving its objectives: Synthesizing Evidence to Inform Policy and Investment (ANALYZE); Supporting Countries to Develop Sustainable Financing Strategies (ACT); and Making School Meals a Political and Fiscal Priority (AMPLIFY).

### Synthesizing evidence to inform policy and investment (ANALYZE)

During 2023–2024, the Sustainable Financing Initiative deepened its research on financing school meals and explored linkages with broader initiatives, such as food system reform. Research outputs included an analysis of donor financing for school meals; technical notes on debt relief, climate finance and hydrocarbon taxation; and a wide-ranging analysis of innovative financing options for school meals. The analysis highlighted the potential role of “sin taxes” on sugar sweetened beverages, ultra-processed foods, alcohol and tobacco in financing healthy diets for children delivered through school meal programmes.

Building on earlier analysis, the Sustainable Financing Initiative also led a major study exploring the cost of accelerating progress towards the goal of universal coverage of school meals, combining a global overview with evidence from national programmes. Across its analytical work, the Sustainable Financing Initiative has a strong focus of equity and financing for children who have been left behind, and in placing school meals within wider food system reform strategies.

Such research informs the development of country strategies and helps to situate school meals in the wider SDG agenda. Recent publications by the Sustainable Financing Initiative include:

- In July 2023, [\*School meal programmes: A missing link in food systems reform\*](#) (Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition, 2023) to influence the 2023 UN Food Systems Summit Stock Take and position school meals as a unique opportunity to improve food systems, climate change adaption and education outcomes.
- In May 2024, [\*School Meals International Donor Analysis\*](#), highlighting under-investment in school meals by donors and the need for better data and transparency in reporting systems.
- In October 2024, with ODI Global, [\*School Feeding and the Sustainable Development Goals: An agenda to combat child hunger, boost education, transform food system and strengthen equity\*](#) (Watkins et al., 2024) making the case for expanding school meal programmes in low and lower-middle-income countries, the Sustainable Financing Initiative presented two scenarios with associated cost estimates and financing options for governments.
- In December 2024, the Sustainable Financing Initiative published a paper on innovative finance, drawing on technical notes on debt swaps and debt relief, climate finance and earmarked taxes (Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition, 2024a).

### **Supporting countries to develop sustainable financing strategies (ACT)**

Using research findings, the Sustainable Financing Initiative works at country level with government members of the School Meals Coalition, WFP, donors, local consultants and other key stakeholders committed to expanding national school meal programmes and transitioning towards country ownership and domestic financing sustainability. The Sustainable Financing Initiative's [\*"Offer of Services"\*](#) and accompanying methodology provide governments with practical tools to develop sustainable financing strategies for school meals. A new online platform, currently being developed, will make these resources available as a global public good.

The Sustainable Financing Initiative's approach is to work collaboratively with governments to estimate the full costs of their school meal programmes (and possible areas for efficiencies); develop strategies (with a focus on equity); allocate existing funding; and identify gaps.



The initiative explores options for closing funding gaps from domestic resources, the transition funding required and options from donors or multilateral development banks. It can also explore additional funding from the private sector, philanthropy funding and untapped resources, e.g. through linkages with local agriculture and climate financing.

Since the Sustainable Financing Initiative, in partnership with WFP, provided initial finance strategy support to Rwanda in 2023, demand for country support has increased rapidly, with requests from governments, WFP country offices and regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Community. In response, ten additional country financing strategies are currently under way or under discussion, including:

- **Sierra Leone:** The Sustainable Financing Initiative is helping to expand the Integrated Home-Grown School Feeding Programme towards universal coverage. Following a funding gap estimation, the Sustainable Financing Initiative supported the government with a fiscal space analysis, which identified available funding. Based on this, a financing strategy is being developed, outlining key pathways for financing the school meal programme, including by exploring improved governance of national resources to generate revenues or establishing a national school meals fund.
- **Ghana:** The Sustainable Financing Initiative is assisting in identifying the full cost of implementing Ghana's School Feeding Strategy, estimating funding gaps and developing a financing strategy. To promote cross-sectoral dialogue and foster engagement around financing, a technical working committee and steering committee were established comprising the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Food and Agriculture; Ministry of Education; and the Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization.

### **Making school meals a political and fiscal priority (AMPLIFY)**

One of the Sustainable Financing Initiative's core research objectives is to inform public policy and drive changes aimed at expanding access to high-quality school meal programmes. This involves working with a high-level steering committee comprised of country and development partner representatives, and engagement with a wide array of actors, including national governments, multilateral development banks, UN agencies and others. The Sustainable Financing Initiative contributes to advocacy and communications efforts via social media, newsletters and high-level speaking events.

The Sustainable Financing Initiative's work under the "AMPLIFY" stream has greatly expanded over the past two years, including with the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty established under the Brazil Presidency of the G20, to position school meals as a central priority. Engagement with the World Bank led to a commitment to increase financing for school meals. In November 2024, the Sustainable Financing Initiative partnered with ODI Global to co-host a global dialogue framed around the joint report [\*School feeding and the Sustainable Development Goals: An agenda to combat child hunger, boost education, transform food systems and strengthen equity\*](#) (Watkins et al., 2024). The event brought together policymakers and thought leaders – including from the World Bank, International Food Policy Research Institute, Sierra Leone, among others – to explore how school meals can serve as a focal point for international cooperation and a catalyst for food system transformation, linking food and climate justice agendas. The Sustainable Financing Initiative also contributed technical knowledge to the Brookings 17 Rooms project under Room 2, and the 2024 G20 in Brazil, including the [\*2030 Sprint for School Meals\*](#).

## The Data and Monitoring Initiative

### Objectives

The Data and Monitoring Initiative, led by WFP, was launched in response to a call from School Meals Coalition member states to address the critical lack of harmonized data on school health and nutrition. Globally, data on school-aged children and national school meal programmes remain fragmented, inconsistently collected and poorly aligned across sectors, undermining governments' ability to assess coverage, track progress or design effective policies.

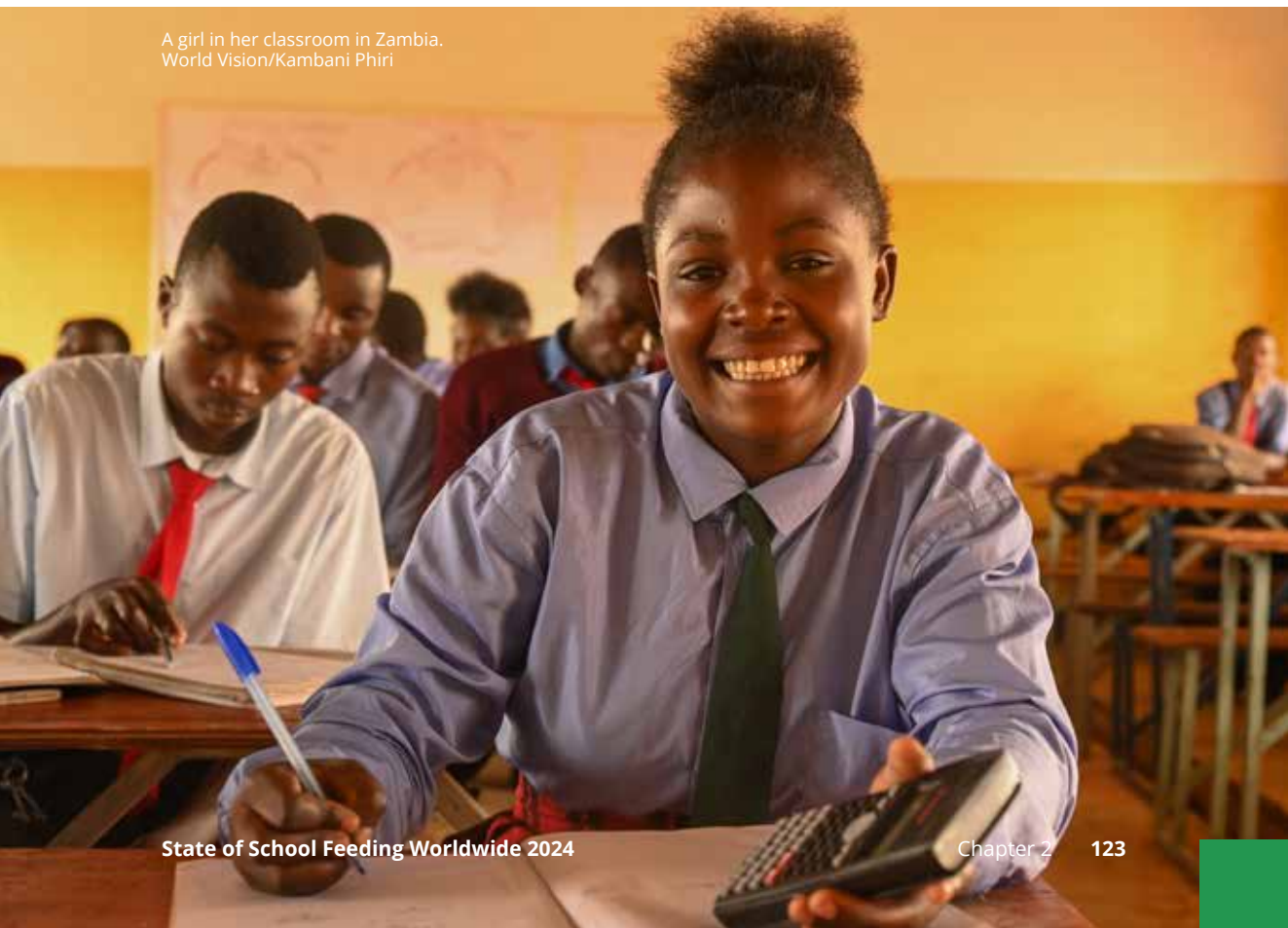
The central aim of this initiative is to improve the availability, accessibility and use of data on national school meal programmes, thereby promoting evidence-based actions for school-aged children. High-quality data enables stakeholders to identify gaps, guide research, support policymaking, track outcomes and improve programme quality and cost-effectiveness.

To meet this goal, the Data and Monitoring Initiative pursues four main objectives:

- Define and promote a core set of global indicators for school meals, with clear methodologies and guidance, to support standardized data collection and use by governments worldwide.
- Propose a new global indicator under SDG 4 to measure school meals coverage, positioning school meals as a key driver of quality education.
- Develop and maintain a global school meals database as a trusted public good, ensuring that data are consistently stored, shared and accessible to stakeholders across countries and sectors.
- Support national governments to collect, validate and report high-quality school meals data, strengthening their capacity to design and implement effective programmes.

Over time, the Data and Monitoring Initiative aims to serve as the global reference point for reliable, comparable and policy-relevant data on school meals.

A girl in her classroom in Zambia.  
World Vision/Kambani Phiri



## How it works

The Data and Monitoring Initiative is coordinated by WFP and governed by a multi-stakeholder steering committee composed of experts from governments, UN agencies, academic institutions and CSOs. To achieve its objectives, the initiative and its partners collaborate through two technical working groups:

- The **Indicators Working Group** brings together diverse stakeholders to identify a core set of indicators for monitoring school meals and related domains, including education, health, nutrition, food systems and WASH. This includes a dedicated set of indicators on the nutritional quality of school meals, addressing a critical evidence gap. The group has also developed and submitted a proposal for the inclusion of a school meals coverage target and indicator under the SDG 4 (Quality Education) framework.
- The **Database Working Group** is developing a global repository to serve as a trusted public good, ensuring that data on school meals and complementary programmes are systematically compiled, stored and made accessible to stakeholders worldwide. The database consolidates data from key sources, including the GCNF surveys, *State of School Feeding Worldwide* reports, the World Bank, African Union and the School Meals Coalition and will continue to expand its functionalities.



A boy fills his water bottle in the Democratic Republic of Congo.  
World Vision/Didier Nagifi Sademok



The Data and Monitoring Initiative works closely with a range of complementary initiatives both within and beyond the School Meals Coalition ecosystem, such as the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative and the Healthy Diets Monitoring Initiative to ensure strategic alignment, foster synergies and prevent duplication.

## Achievements

Since its launch, the Data and Monitoring Initiative has established itself as a key actor in the School Meals Coalition ecosystem, driving forward a harmonized global data architecture for school meals. It has regularly convened a diverse group of technical experts across governments, UN agencies, academia and civil society, and has completed a comprehensive review of over 250 indicators across 11 conceptual frameworks. This led to the development of a set of core indicators to guide national monitoring and global reporting on school meals and the initiative is currently incorporating indicators on complementary topics, including education, health, nutrition, food systems and WASH.

A major milestone has been the development of a global school meals coverage indicator under the SDG 4 (Quality Education) framework. Responding to the School Meals Coalition's 2022 Leaders' Declaration, the Data and Monitoring Initiative led a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process to design a rigorous methodology. The proposal was formally submitted and presented to the UNESCO Education Data and Statistics Commission and has gained significant support among member states. Its adoption will represent a landmark recognition of school meals as a national policy agenda.

In July 2024, the Data and Monitoring Initiative launched the first iteration of the Global Database on School Meals,<sup>3</sup> presented during a joint webinar with the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, attended by 117 participants from over 40 countries. The database integrates data from multiple global sources and is continually updated and refined in alignment with the endorsed core indicators. In collaboration with the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, the Data and Monitoring Initiative is integrating data from cities and municipalities into the database, recognizing the central role of local governments in the implementation of school meal programmes and enhancing the granularity of school meals data.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.schoolmealscoalitiondatabase.wfp.org/>

Another important workstream in partnership with the Research Consortium focuses on providing users with access to the latest, most relevant publications and evidence on school meals and complementary interventions.

The Data and Monitoring Initiative has also initiated discussions with partners on how to provide technical support to governments in integrating the core indicator set into national monitoring systems. This work aims to offer guidance on indicator selection and alignment with existing data systems, strengthening country ownership, fostering collaboration and enhancing the reporting mechanisms for national data on school meals.

## The Cities Feeding the Future Initiative

### Objectives

The Cities Feeding the Future Initiative – led by the [\*Milan Urban Food Policy Pact\*](#) (secretariat) – was launched in October 2023 with the goal to improve school meal programmes by strengthening relationships between and among local and national governments. The initiative aims to connect city policies on school meal programmes with the goals of national governments and regional and global agendas. It takes a multidisciplinary approach, recognizing the health, environmental and social impacts of school meal programmes and their reliance on the local areas where schools operate. The Cities Feeding the Future Initiative has three main objectives, to:

- empower the role of cities in implementing school meals;
- facilitate knowledge-sharing among cities and global actors; and
- support decision making processes at the local level.

### How it works

Cities are central to setting up and managing school meal programmes that truly meet local needs, as they can facilitate community feedback and turn residents' needs into practical actions.

The Milan Pact works with more than 300 cities, representing around 500 million inhabitants, making it the largest network of cities focusing on urban food systems worldwide. The Milan Pact is supported by partners ranging from international organizations to universities, research centres and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Within the Milan Pact, more than 65 percent of cities provide school meals, making it a very relevant topic on which to share best practices and exchange knowledge.

The objectives of the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative are advanced through three main areas of action and related activities:

- I. **Advocacy:** This includes working with champion mayors who lead by example in shaping effective school meal programmes, and organizing national and regional dialogues to influence governments and partners.

Exceptional examples of the Milan Pact's champion mayors who have played a leading role in school meal programmes are:

- *Chadchart Sittipunt, Governor of Bangkok*, who established a school canteen policy to offer free breakfast and lunch for children in 437 schools in the city. The city has also made a strong contribution in showcasing best practices on school meals in the region. For this reason, in 2024, the city hosted the 2nd Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Asia Pacific Regional Forum titled "Nourishing growing cities: enhancing school meals and supporting local communities".
- *Adanech Abiebie, Mayor of Addis Ababa*, who initiated a school meal programme in the city, which now operates in 255 institutions, benefiting 801,000 students. This commitment resulted in the city hosting the 6th Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Regional Forum in Africa in 2024 entirely dedicated to school meals. The forum provided a platform for dialogue, collaboration and knowledge exchange among African cities.
- *Sakaja Arthur Johnson, Governor of Nairobi*, who designed a sustainable school meal programme for all public primary schools and early childhood development learners to guarantee access to a high-quality, nutritious meal.
- *Giuseppe Sala, Mayor of Milan*, who has shown a unique dedication to improving school meals in the city, by guaranteeing adequate and sustainable meals to 83,000 children. He has also actively engaged in key international events on the subject, including the 58th Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank, where he highlighted the critical role of investing in school meal programmes for advancing shared development goals.

- II. **Sharing of best practices:** Collection of data to complement the School Meals Coalition's database to gather best practices and specific learning needs on school meal programmes from signatory cities to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. Best practices are disseminated by hosting technical workshops for cities and global experts.



**III. Research:** Advancing research is essential for success. The Cities Feeding the Future Initiative conducts feasibility studies to co-design successful school meal programmes using a participatory approach. It also provides technical support to help cities set up the necessary infrastructure for strengthening their school meal programmes.

Since its launch, the Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, together with key partners, has created multiple opportunities across the globe for cities to engage and learn from each other. Among other efforts, the initiative has mobilized more than 200 representatives from more than 30 cities during Milan Urban Food Policy Pact events and regional fora (see Table 2.4 for examples of events organized by the initiative).

Specifically, since 2023, the city of Milan itself has hosted 55 city delegations to exchange good practices on school meal programmes. Study visits comprised field trips, workshops and seminars, delivering comprehensive insights into Milan's school meal system. Each study visit covered a set of context-specific interests from cities, which guaranteed a targeted learning programme. Recently, a subset of the hosted city delegations has been supported in developing structured feasibility studies, with technical guidance on implementing school meal programmes. The case study below provides a deeper dive into innovations championed by the city of Milan.



School meals in South Sudan help girls to stay in school.  
WFP/Samantha Reinders

**Table 2.4**

Events organized by the School Meals Coalition's Cities Feeding the Future Initiative

Event	Participants, governments and partners	Declaration/ Outreach document
<b>"The Power of Public Food Procurement for School Meals", Copenhagen</b>	Around 100 participants from several cities and partner organizations	<a href="#"><i>Report_The-power-of-public-food-procurement_light.pdf</i></a>
<b>6th Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Regional Forum for Africa "School Meals Programmes for Healthier and Sustainable African Cities", Addis Ababa</b>	Around 50 participants from 14 cities and several partner organizations	<a href="#"><i>REPORT-MUFPP-Regional-Forum-Addis-Ababa.pdf</i></a>  <a href="#"><i>ENG_Summary-of-Agreement-and-Ways-Forward-3.pdf</i></a>
<b>2nd Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Asia Pacific Regional Forum, Bangkok</b>  "Nourishing Growing Cities: Enhancing School Meals and Supporting Local Communities"	Around 70 participants from 17 cities and several partner organizations	<a href="#"><i>2nd-MUEPP-Asia-Pacific-Regional-Forum_Report_Final.pdf</i></a>
<b>Summer School "Spreading Experiences and Knowledge on School Meals Programmes in ASEAN Cities", Bandung</b>  In partnership with ASEAN and supported by the Parahyangan Catholic University and the Municipality of Bandung, funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.	Gathered 80 participants from 30 cities in 8 ASEAN member states	<a href="#"><i>Report of the School Meals Summer School in ASEAN Cities</i></a>

## Case study

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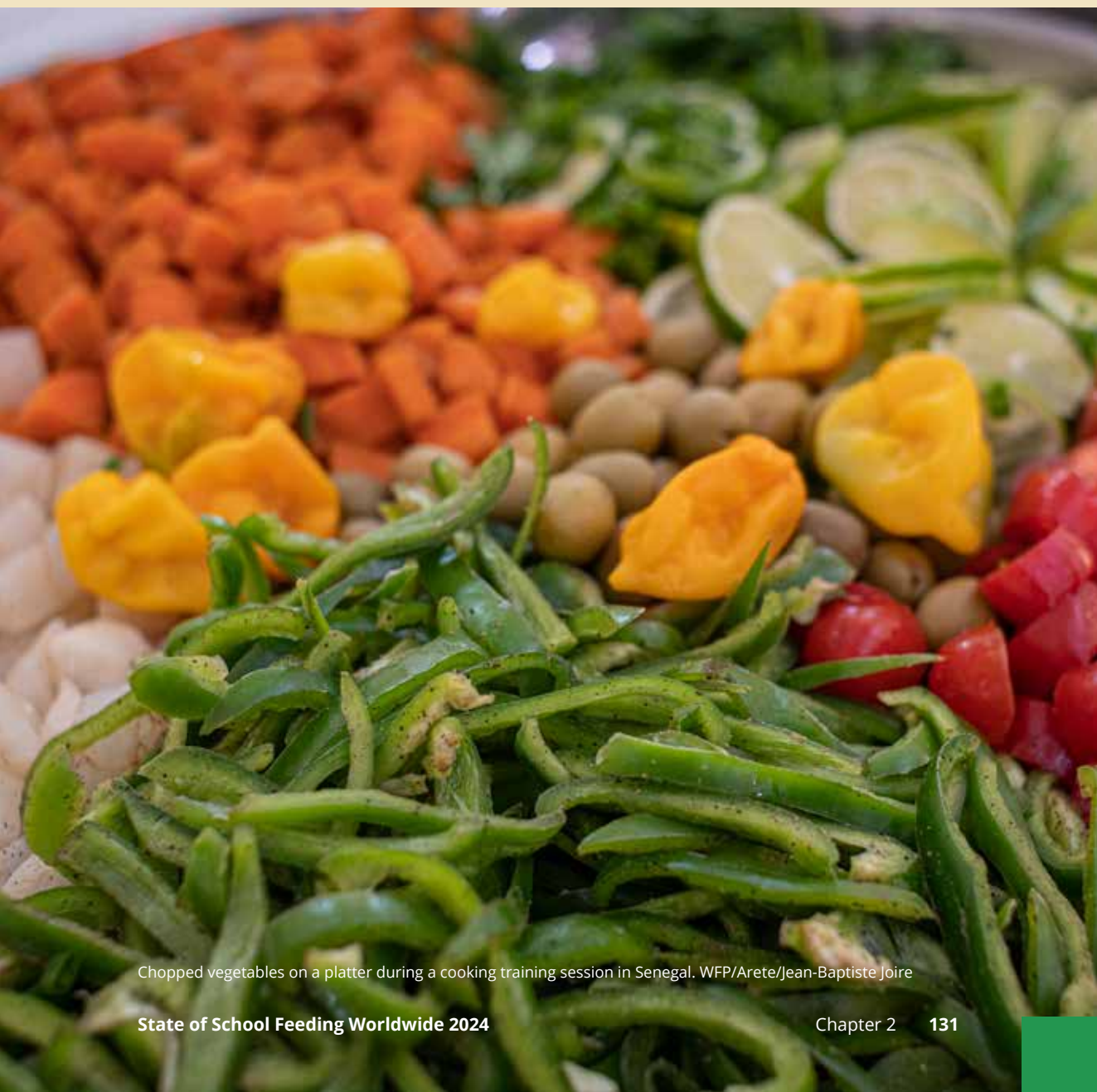
### How Milan is leading the way in school meals innovation

Milan offers a valuable case study in the evolution of school meal programmes globally. Initiated by a City Council Resolution in December 1900, Milan's school meal programme has since become a main driver for reaching the ambitious objectives of the Milan Food Policy. The service is managed by the municipal agency for school canteens – Milano Ristorazione – created to provide children with “healthy, good, educational and fair” meals. Milano Ristorazione manages the entire school meals chain, designing seasonal menus in collaboration with nutrition experts and overseeing the sourcing of raw materials, prioritizing quality, sustainability and supply chain traceability. The agency produces 83,000 meals daily, thanks to 24 kitchen centres and more than 80 internal kitchens.

Each age group has a dedicated menu structure based on the Nutritional Recommended Intake Level for the Italian population. Two distinct four-week seasonal menus are prepared for the summer and winter seasons. A typical meal is generally composed of a first dish, a second dish, a side dish, bread and fruits. Cooking methods are selected to ensure that the meal is tasty and nutritious, encouraging oven steam cooking and excluding fried dishes. The combination of different colours in recipes, the adoption of local and seasonal ingredients, the introduction of recipes linked to the Milanese gastronomic culture and the rotation of a variety of ingredients are particularly encouraged. To meet the needs of children with food-related specific health conditions or who have specific diets for ethical/religious reasons, a large set of special menus are also included. Milan has promoted a significant protein transition, including a massive reduction of animal-based foods and an increase in legumes and organic options. In 2015, Milan joined the Cool Food Pledge initiative to monitor the impact of menus, leading to a 36 percent reduction in food-related greenhouse gas emissions in 2024.

Milano Ristorazione uses public procurement as a key tool to influence and guide suppliers towards more sustainable and inclusive practices. It has adopted a supplier selection system in which procurement criteria go beyond price, placing strong emphasis on technical and quality standards. As a consequence, 26 food products are sourced within a 70 km radius of the city.

Finally, the city has worked extensively on the development of educational materials for children and families to improve awareness of food consumption and reconnect them with the production of food. As an example, families and children regularly receive menu leaflets accompanied by information on the cooking methods used, the seasonality of ingredients and the overall environmental impact of each daily meal. A dinner menu proposal, complementary to the school lunch menu, is also offered to families. Parent and teacher engagement is supported through the establishment of School Meals Committees to improve students' eating environment.



Chopped vegetables on a platter during a cooking training session in Senegal. WFP/Arete/Jean-Baptiste Joire

## 2.4 The School Meals Coalition in action: partners powering progress

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The School Meals Coalition unites more than 140 partners from civil society, academia, think tanks, foundations, UN agencies and international financial institutions. Partners' support to governments ranges from research and evidence building to advocacy, technical assistance and implementation, and is transforming the global school meals landscape.

The importance of partners' work is also highlighted in countries' national commitments, many of which explicitly reference how they will work with the Coalition's global initiatives and partners to enhance their efforts.

This section highlights how various partners are engaging with each other as well as with governments and the School Meals Coalition.

### Civil society organizations – amplifying voices, enhancing school meals globally

Civil society organizations (CSOs), including national and international NGOs, research and academic institutions, community groups and foundations, are essential partners in the School Meals Coalition, strengthening government-led school meal programmes through advocacy, technical support and implementation. By leveraging their expertise, fostering collaboration and mobilizing resources, CSOs enhance national school meal programmes. Their contributions span national, regional and global levels, enabling best practice exchanges and networks that help scale sustainable programmes. Over 80 CSOs are currently School Meals Coalition partners, up from around 30 at the Coalition's inception in 2021.





At the 2023 School Meals Coalition Global Summit in Paris, over 100 CSOs issued a Joint Call to Action, coordinated by World Vision International, Plan International and the International Parliamentary Network for Education. The call to action urged governments to honour their commitments and donors to increase investments in school meals, particularly in low-income and conflict-affected countries. The advocacy gained traction at global fora such as COP 28, the G20 and the UN High-Level Political Forum.

World Vision International has been instrumental in coordinating CSO efforts within the School Meals Coalition. As a driving force behind the call to action, World Vision International galvanizes CSOs by aligning interventions with global processes and ministerial meetings, ensuring school meals remain central in global discussions.

CSOs have driven efforts nationally and regionally, fostering multi-country collaboration and cross-sectoral dialogue, as well as bringing local perspectives to the table (communities and schools) through regional events and various processes, including:

- **Africa:** At a 2024 ECOWAS meeting in Senegal, CSOs guided discussions on home-grown school meal models, influencing commitments from seven governments. In Kenya, World Vision International convened over 40 organizations to share experiences and integrate their efforts to support governments in programmes, operations, advocacy and communications across the region.
- **Asia:** CSOs met with government leaders from South-East Asian nations, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, in a special regional summit to collaborate in identifying coherent and integrated cross-sectorial policy priorities, crucial for school meals implementation and localization success.
- **Latin America and the Caribbean:** At a regional meeting in Mexico, CSOs engaged 26 countries on sustainable school meals, integration of local farmers and climate resilience.

At the 2024 United Nations General Assembly, CSOs such as World Vision International, BRAC, Hungry for Action, SDG 2 Action Hub and Ação da Cidadania, partnered with WFP and the G20 Chair, Brazil, to highlight the transformative role of school meals in low-income and conflict-affected countries.



Through their work, CSOs position school meal programmes as solutions to challenges such as gender inclusivity, economic development, social protection and food security. By addressing gaps and providing expertise, they ensure these programmes are sustainable, resilient and impactful, enhancing lives and strengthening communities.

### **Box 2.3**

#### **CSOs – Food 4 Education driving innovation and implementation**

In Kenya, Food 4 Education is transforming school nutrition with a bottom-up approach to ensure no child is hungry at school. Starting in 2012 with a single kitchen serving 25 students, in 2024 the organization provided nutritious meals to over 450,000 children across 1,263 schools.

But its impact extends beyond meal provision. Food 4 Education is building a scalable model for school meal programmes across Africa by:

- Designing a replicable blueprint for school meal programmes.
- Operating at scale to refine and demonstrate the model's success.
- Supporting governments to adapt and implement the approach in their own contexts.

Food 4 Education's operations are powered by data and technology, including the innovative Tap2Eat system — tech-enabled wristbands linked to digital wallets. This system streamlines parental payments, tracks meal delivery and reduces food waste. The organization also prioritizes local sourcing: 80 percent of ingredients come from the kitchen's local region, and 100 percent of commodities are Kenyan grown, boosting local economies and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Food 4 Education works closely with government partners, exemplified by its 2023 collaboration with the Governor of Nairobi to roll out county-wide school meals.

The organization's vision for 2027 is ambitious: reaching 1 million children in Kenya and supporting at least two additional African governments to replicate the model – ultimately impacting an additional 2 million children across the continent.

Food 4 Education's work blends innovation, community engagement and public-sector collaboration, illustrating the pivotal role of CSOs in driving sustainable solutions for school meals.

#### **Box 2.4**

##### **Advocacy in action – The CSO-led path to Canada's School Food Programme**

After decades of advocacy and coalition building, and thanks to the tireless efforts of the Coalition for Healthy School Food and its partners, the Government of Canada made the historic decision to fund a National School Food Programme and published its National School Food Policy in 2024. Founded in 2014, the Coalition for Healthy School Food – representing organizations across every province and territory in the country – united hundreds of groups, including school food NGOs, academics, school boards, municipalities and health agencies around [\*eight shared guiding principles\*](#) (Coalition for Healthy School Food, 2018; Hernandez et al., 2018).

Through the #NourishKidsNow campaign, members of the Coalition for Healthy School Food engaged policymakers, particularly gathering public support after the programme was listed as an unfunded commitment in the 2019 Federal Budget. A standout moment of the campaign was a teacher's 200-lap run on Parliament's lawn in 2023, symbolizing the US\$144 million<sup>4</sup> annual funding promise made in 2021.

Collaboration with researchers was pivotal in the movement's success. Sponsored by the Arrell Family Foundation, Dr Amberley T. Ruetz's report, [\*The Economic Rationale for Investing in School Meal Programs for Canada: multi-sectoral impacts from comparable high-income countries\*](#), presented compelling evidence of the programme's benefits, including a 2.5x–7x return on investment in human health and economic benefits in comparable high-income countries.

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<sup>4</sup> Exchange rate at the time of writing 1 Canadian Dollar= 0.72 U.S. Dollars.

Key pieces of evidence that the Government of Canada found most persuasive were the sections detailing cost savings for families; school meals increasing students' future earnings; agrifood sector economic development and job creation; and the impact of increasing mothers' labour-market participation. A draft of the report was strategically shared with policymakers and fellow researchers before it was finalized to identify gaps while government departments were planning their federal budget proposals. This iterative approach ensured the report was tailored to address policymakers' questions and was best positioned to make the investment case for school meals.

In 2024, the government committed US\$720 million over five years to expand access to school meals to 400,000 more children annually – a historic step towards ensuring every child has access to healthy food at school.

Collaboration with researchers, CSO leadership, strategic evidence sharing and sustained advocacy were key drivers of this historic progress, highlighting the power of collective action to nourish Canada's children.

## UN agencies – partnering for health, nutrition and learning

Leaders of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO) all joined the School Meals Coalition at its launch. In a joint declaration, they committed to working together to help governments set priorities, make commitments and implement plans. These agencies provide operational support, policy advice and technical guidance to the Coalition. They also push for better data collection and analysis, increased investment and higher-quality services to support children's healthy development and education.

The “Stepping up effective school health and nutrition” partnership – led by UNESCO, and including the Global Partnership for Education, the UN Nutrition Secretariat, the World Bank Group and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition – works to scale up effective, integrated policies and programmes. By bringing together experts from different sectors, this group helps countries develop practical, integrated approaches that connect education, health and nutrition.

Building on commitments from the 2022 Transforming Education Summit and the 2023 global status report *Ready to learn and thrive: School health and nutrition around the world* (UNESCO et al., 2023), the inter-agency group continues to champion health, nutrition and well-being as integral to quality education. A key milestone was the 2024 Global Education Meeting in Fortaleza, Brazil – the first to highlight cross-sectoral approaches to transformative education with a focus on student well-being.

In 2024, a UNICEF–WFP collaboration in Eastern and Southern Africa resulted in three country case studies (Malawi, South Sudan and Zimbabwe) that demonstrate collaboration in action for school-aged children and adolescents. UNICEF and WFP are working together with governments in these countries to provide school meals, nutrition services, clean water and sanitation, creating healthier learning environments for thousands of children (UNICEF & WFP, 2025).

To bridge the gap between national ambitions and practical implementation, UNESCO and its partners are developing tools to help countries integrate health and well-being into their education sector plans. A briefing note for policymakers outlines why this is essential and how governments can make use of such resources. A forthcoming handbook will provide practical guidance on sector analysis, joint reviews, programme design, implementation, costing, budgeting and monitoring.

In 2025, FAO and WFP presented a methodology and guidance package to design, implement and monitor data-driven and context-specific nutrition guidelines and standards for school meal programmes. The methodology has already been used to develop guidelines in Cambodia and Ghana.



In Somalia, a girl enjoys her school lunch. WFP/Mahad Said

## International financial institutions – driving investments in school health and nutrition

At the Second Ministerial Meeting of the School Meals Coalition’s Task Force, held in October 2024, in Nairobi, Kenya, task force members, along with special guests such as the African Development Bank and Islamic Development Bank, emphasized the importance of coordinated efforts and sustainable investments to elevate school meals as a global, fiscal and political priority. International financial institutions are essential partners in expanding and sustaining school meal programmes, addressing the financial and operational challenges often faced by governments. While international financial institutions have shown increasing interest in supporting school meals, further efforts are needed to enhance coordination and optimize the financial resources available to governments. Several international financial institutions have launched initiatives that contribute to school meals financing, but there remains significant potential for more strategic, large-scale and sustained investments.

Among the international financial institutions making tangible contributions, the African Development Bank and Children’s Investment Fund Foundation have recently partnered to establish the End School-Age Hunger Fund, with an initial commitment of US\$50 million from the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation. This initiative aims to provide a mix of grants and concessional loans to support pilots in an initial ten African countries to expand their school meal programmes to reach 10 million vulnerable children, supporting governments in their long-term vision of achieving universal school meals coverage by 2030. The fund is expected to catalyse further financing and drive a more structured investment approach in Africa.

The Islamic Development Bank and WFP are advancing school meals financing through the Nutritious Start: Human Capital Development Initiative. This initiative aims to increase financial support for nutrition and school meal programmes in member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Under the Human Capital Development Initiative, WFP has committed to raising US\$5 million per year in grants, while the Islamic Development Bank will complement these efforts with concessional and non-concessional financing up to three times this amount to expand nutrition activities and school meals coverage. The initiative aligns with broader development goals to enhance nutrition, improve educational outcomes and foster long-term human capital growth.



International financial institutions are also supporting home-grown school meal programmes, which emphasize local procurement to enhance economic resilience and sustainable food systems. This focus is reflected in national and regional discussions. For instance, in West Africa, ECOWAS together with the African Development Bank facilitated commitments from seven governments to expand and enhance home-grown school meal programmes and emphasized the importance of robust policy development, sustainable financing and enhanced collaboration within government sectors and partners to strengthen the overall impact and sustainability of home-grown school meal initiatives. The World Bank's 2023 Evolution Roadmap, its Global Challenge Programme for Food and Nutrition Security and commitments under the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty underscore the potential of home-grown school meals in advancing food security and social protection through multisectoral approaches. Collaboration with key partners such as the Global Agricultural and Food Security Programme and Global Partnership for Education – where WFP was accredited as a Global Partnership for Education grant agent this year – has also been pivotal. Translating this momentum into action requires stronger direct investment, closer alignment with national strategies and expanded collaboration with partners to scale home-grown school meal programmes in a sustainable manner.

Through the School Meals Coalition's Sustainable Financing Initiative, international financial institutions have a unique opportunity to champion sustainable investment frameworks that align with government priorities and their financial commitments to school meals. Stronger engagement from international financial institutions in this area could drive the advancement of innovative financing solutions – such as debt swaps for school meals and climate-linked funding mechanisms – while fostering fiscal space for governments to scale these programmes sustainably and effectively over the long term.

Looking ahead, the growing engagement from new partners, such as the Asian Development Bank, offers a pivotal opportunity to enhance the reach and impact of government-led school meal programmes, showcasing powerful examples of multilateral collaboration in action.

## 2.5 Way forward: paving the way for universal school meals

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The Second Ministerial Meeting of the Coalition's Task Force in Nairobi marked a pivotal moment for the School Meals Coalition, defining a clear, collective road map for 2025–2026 (see Box 2.1). The way forward is shaped by the six priorities endorsed by the task force. The Coalition's next phase will focus on putting these commitments into action with greater ambition and coordination.

A central priority will be positioning school meals as a cornerstone investment in human capital and economic growth. This means scaling up political advocacy, engaging ministers of finance and international financial institutions. The Sustainable Financing Initiative will play a central role in these efforts, supporting countries in mobilizing domestic and external resources for sustainable, nationally owned programmes.

The School Meals Coalition will also continue to accelerate support at country level – facilitating technical assistance, knowledge exchange and strategic partnerships to scale up national programmes. The new initiative of the School Meals Coalition will be instrumental in this work, ensuring demand-driven support for low and lower-income countries to develop sustainable and effective national school meal systems.

Evidence and accountability will remain at the heart of the School Meals Coalition's mission. Through the Research Consortium, the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* reports and the new global database on school meals created by the Data and Monitoring Initiative, the Coalition will improve access to actionable data and share insights on programme impact, cost-efficiency and innovation.

Recognizing the importance of subnational leadership, the Coalition will also continue to deepen its engagement with cities and municipalities through its Cities Feeding the Future Initiative, mobilizing local leaders and ensuring cities and municipalities inform regional and global dialogues.

Looking ahead, the School Meals Coalition will leverage global platforms to amplify its advocacy, including key events such as South Africa's G20 Presidency and COP 30 in Brazil. These gatherings will be strategic in terms of galvanizing high-level support and fostering collaboration among member countries.

With a clear vision and strengthened collaboration, the School Meals Coalition stands ready to transform shared commitments into lasting impact to ensure sustainable, impactful and inclusive school meal programmes as a cornerstone of development.



A girl with her mother, who supplies crops for school meals in Cambodia.  
World Vision/Dara Chhim, Ben Adams, Elissa Webster

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