

2nd UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake (UNFSS+4)

Concept Note for Session Co-leads

July 27-29, 2025 – Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

18 July 2025 version

1. Title of the session:

Unlocking Sustainable Investments for Home-Grown School Meals

2. Type of the session:

Featured Event

3. Date and time of the session:

29 July, 8am to 8:45am

4. Session background:

Born out of the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, the [School Meals Coalition](#) has grown into a powerful international network of 109 governments, 6 regional bodies and over 140 partners. Over the past four years, its member countries have achieved impressive results, making it one of the most concrete and catalytic initiatives driving progress toward sustainable food systems.

Currently, 54 member countries have made [commitments](#) to enhance their school meal programmes and transform local food systems. Among these, 39 countries specifically address financing by either increasing domestic budgets or providing financial support to countries seeking to expand and improve their programmes.

The Ministerial session will focus on government leadership on unlocking sustainable investments for school meals to drive food systems transformation and advance multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

The session will take a food systems approach by positioning school meals as a strategic, multisectoral investment that connects agriculture, nutrition, education, and social protection. It will highlight how school meal programmes drive systemic change by linking local food production to public procurement, improving child nutrition and learning outcomes, and acting as a platform for coordinated public investment. The session will demonstrate how integrated policies and financing can build more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food systems for future generations.

5. Context:

Governments increasingly recognize school meal programmes as strategic, long-term investments in human capital, food systems, and national development. School meal programmes represent 70% of all publicly managed food systems, making up a global market of around USD 48 billion annually, of this, 98% financed by national governments. They are proven high-impact investments, with every dollar yielding returns ranging from \$7 to \$35 in social and economic benefits. This growing domestic commitment reflects a shift in perception: school meals are no longer seen as just social support programmes, but as foundational to sustainable development and food system transformation.

Despite fiscal constraints, countries are innovating to strengthen and scale financing for school meals. These include leveraging natural resource revenues, sin taxes, debt swaps, thematic bonds, and other financing mechanisms. However, unlocking sustainable and predictable financing—and, where appropriate, innovative - especially in low- and lower-middle-income countries—requires coordinated action, cross-sectoral planning, credible budgeting and creative financial engineering.

By approaching school meals through sustainable and innovative finance, countries are making a paradigm shift – one that forges new food systems that are regenerative, resilient to shocks, farmer-centric and inclusive, and nutrition-sensitive.

One example of successful sustainable investment is home-grown school feeding programmes. Governments are increasingly viewing these initiatives as strategic investments that yield long-term returns by strengthening local food systems, supporting communities and promoting social and environmental resilience. By sourcing food directly from smallholder farmers, these programmes create stable markets, boost rural incomes, generate employment, and empower marginalized groups, including women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples.

Moreover, home-grown school meals, if well-designed, can effectively align demand- and supply-side policy levers to drive food systems transformation. On the supply side, they promote practices that improve soil health, enhance farm resilience, increase yields, and support biodiversity and ecosystem services. On the demand side, they encourage a shift in consumer preferences toward healthier, more sustainable diets, which helps reduce food waste and shorten supply chains.

6. Session objectives:

Unlocking sustainable investments for home-grown school meals is essential to realizing their full potential as a driver of food systems transformation. As governments increasingly recognize these programmes as long-term, strategic investments, the challenge now lies in mobilizing predictable, multi-year financing that supports local procurement, strengthens rural economies, and delivers lasting nutritional and educational outcomes.

The session will address this crucial challenge by spotlighting how countries are stepping up their financial investments on school meals to drive food systems transformation. By presenting evidence and hearing governments' lessons learned, the session will explore

coordinated, multisectoral approaches that demonstrate how school meals are serving as a platform for delivering on food systems transformation, education, and social protection goals through sustainable and innovative finance mechanisms. Furthermore, this session will demonstrate how government leadership, underpinned by domestic financing and complemented international cooperation, can drive whole-of-system reform.

Country efforts examples include how school meal procurement is prioritizing smallholder farmer participation; how menus are being reengineered to better source foods locally; and how governments are scaling up investments, to deliver multiple benefits, including improving food systems outcomes. Examples include cases of scale up of programmes and specific financing solutions.

The session will illustrate how the School Meals Coalition's new approach to multilateralism delivers results for people most in need. The session will also serve as a key milestone on the road to the School Meals Coalition Global Summit in September in Brazil, while supporting the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty's goal of reaching an additional 150 million children with school meals by 2030, contributing to the broader agenda of sustainable food systems and climate resilience in the lead-up to UN climate talks (COP30).

7. Link UNFSS+4 objectives

- **Reflecting on Progress:** Governments will share their progress in leveraging school meals to drive food systems transformation and multiple Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Partnerships and Tracking Commitments:** The session will explore coordinated, multisectoral approaches that demonstrate how school meals are serving as a platform for delivering on food systems transformation, education, and social protection goals through sustainable and innovative finance mechanisms.
- **Unlocking Finance and Increasing Investments:** The session focus will be on spotlighting how governments are stepping up their financial investments on school meals, including innovative sources of financing.

8. Key message(s) of the session:

- Increasingly, governments are recognizing school meals as long-term national investments and increasing domestic spending on these programmes.
- Countries show the way forward to strengthen and scale financing, including innovative mechanisms.
- Cross-sectoral planning and credible budgeting for school meals are crucial to facilitating sustainable partnerships between governments and funders, helping countries transition towards self-reliance.

9. Session format:

The 45-min session will feature a panel with four government speakers at Ministerial level (Ethiopia, Kenya, Guatemala, Cambodia), preceded by welcome remarks by WFP's

Executive Director, Cindy McCain, and opening remarks by the Government of France as co-chair of the School Meals Coalition. UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, will deliver the closing remarks. The session will be moderated by the Director of the School Meals Coalition Secretariat and Director of the School Meals and Social Protection Service at WFP, Carmen Burbano.

10. Guiding questions for speakers:

These are the generic questions, while each speaker will be asked a tailored question from the moderator:

- What's your national commitment to school meals, how is your government leveraging school meals for food system transformation?
- What challenges is your country facing in scaling up home-grown school meals?
- What are your plans to mobilize financing to both provide nutritious school meals to children and provide small-scale farmers access to markets?

11. Desirable outcome:

- Increased visibility of successful financing pathways for home-grown school feeding.
- Recognition of the role of multisectoral players and approaches that impact and secure continued growth through food systems lens.
- Concrete recommendations to spur new commitments to unlock sustainable investments for home-grown school meals to be brought forward to the School Meals Coalition Global Summit in September in Brazil.

12. Run of show

Session introduction by moderator, Ms. Carmen Burbano, Director of the School Meals Coalition Secretariat and Director of the School Meals and Social Protection Service at the World Food Programme (WFP).

Welcome remarks (3 min) by Ms. Cindy McCain, Executive Director of WFP.

Opening remarks (3 min) by H.E. Chrysoula Zacharopoulou, Special Envoy of the President of the Republic of France to the UNFSS+4 Summit, speaking as co-chair of the School Meals Coalition

Governments Leading the Way - four Ministers:

H.E. Professor Birhanu Nega, Minister of Education, **Ethiopia** (4 min)

Mr. Harun Yusuf, CEO National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK), **Kenya** (4 min)

H.E. Dr. Ouk Makara, Vice Chairman of the Council for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD), **Cambodia** (4 min)

H.E. Ms. Martha Salazar, Deputy Secretary of Food and Nutritional Security, **Guatemala** (4 min)

Closing remarks (3 min) by UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed.

13. List of speakers:

Name	Affiliation/Title	Country/ Region
Cindy McCain	WFP Executive Director	Global
H.E. Chrysoula Zacharopoulou	Special Envoy of the President of the Republic of France to the UNFSS+4 Summit, speaking as co-chair of the School Meals Coalition	France
H.E. Birhanu Nega	Minister of Education	Ethiopia
Harun Yusuf	CEO National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK)	Kenya
H.E. Martha Salazar	Deputy Secretary of Food and Nutritional Security	Guatemala
H.E. Ouk Makara	Vice Chairman of the Council for Agricultural and Rural Development	Cambodia
Amina J. Mohammed	UN Deputy Secretary-General	Global

14. Additional links/documents:

School Meals Coalition website: www.schoolmealscoalition.org

[School Meals and Food Systems: Rethinking the consequences for climate, environment, biodiversity, and food sovereignty | School Meals Coalition](#)

[The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 | World Food Programme](#) - new edition coming up in September