

Ensuring Access to Nutritious Meals, Clean Water, and Hygiene: Promoting Safety and Resilience in Every School Meal Investment

The Coalition brings together [over 110 governments](#) and [more than 150 partners](#) and through its [five strategic initiatives](#) aims to position school meals as a transformative investment in children, food systems and national development. To date, more than 60 governments have submitted national commitments to the Coalition, reflecting a range of policy, financing and programmatic actions that strengthen and advance school meals programmes. This pager aims to support Coalition members and partners in their speaking engagements and meetings as it offers key messages and country examples to highlight the role of water-smart agriculture, clean water and hygiene in school meal programmes.

SCHOOL MEALS AS CROSS-SECTORAL POLICY TOOL FOR AFRICA

The African continent has seen the most significant expansion of school meal programmes of any region over a period of just two years, as reported in the latest [State of School Feeding Worldwide](#). The number of children receiving school meals rose by over 30 percent from 66 million to [87 million](#). In just two years Kenya, Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Rwanda increased the number of pupils receiving school meals between 1.5 and 6-fold.

Despite this progress, [challenges remain](#), particularly in securing adequate and sustained financing, strengthening infrastructure and logistics, including kitchen facilities and access to clean water, hygiene and sanitation, as well as in promoting programme integration. Low-income and fragile countries continue to require external financial support in the medium term, while other contexts increasingly need more sustainable domestic financing and cost-efficient delivery models.

By aligning school meals within the regional water agenda, governments can build momentum ahead of the [UN Water Conference](#) in December this year and articulate ambitious, integrated commitments. These include strengthening water services for Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF), expanding access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in schools and establishing sustainable budgetary and policy frameworks that enable coordinated multisectoral action across education, health, nutrition and water sectors.

SUSTAINABLE WATER AVAILABILITY AND SAFE SANITATION SYSTEMS FOR SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMMES

- Schools are vital for helping ensure that children have access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, which is essential for shaping healthy, dignified and equitable learning environment for boys and girls. This can be especially true in [emergencies](#), where schools can serve as access points for lifesaving food, water and other resources.

- School health and nutrition programmes typically include an integrated package of interventions that together seek to meet the needs of the learner in the local context. School meals may be one of these [components](#), other complementary activities may include: handwashing with soap, drinking water and water purification.
- [Reliable water and sanitation systems](#) are also critical to effective school meal programmes regardless of context, enabling safe food preparation, cooking and access to drinking water - all of which are fundamental to protecting children's health and the nutritional impact of school meals.
- According to the Coalition's [Research Consortium's](#) white [paper](#), the integration of WASH in schools within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4.a, 6.1 and 6.2) has been instrumental in elevating global attention and commitment to safe and inclusive learning environments. In Sub-Saharan Africa, inadequate WASH in schools contributes to the continued [high burden of diarrhoeal disease and helminth infections](#) among school-aged children.
- According to the Coalition's [Research Consortium](#), every \$1 invested in school meals generates up to [\\$35](#) in economic benefits across different sectors, but these returns are only achieved when children are healthy enough to stay in school, and thus, requires reliable WASH services.

Country Examples:

- Of the 55 countries in the African Union: [44 reported](#) integrated hand washing with soap into their school meals programmes; [37 reported](#) the integration of drinking water into school meal programmes; [23 reported](#) the integrated water purification practices into their school meals programmes.
- The Government of Malawi, with technical support from UNICEF, UNFPA, and WFP, has also provided an integrated package of interventions, including school meals, WASH, and gender-transformative education, to over 300,000 children and adolescents. The [integrated approach](#) revealed to improve learning outcomes and reduced gender differences in dropout rates.
- The Rwandan government covers bills for the water and electricity of schools to ensure the consistent availability of WASH services.
- Benin's school meal programme reaches 80% of student, in pursuit of reaching 100% coverage by 2026. The government has outlined improving schools' infrastructure, including having drinking water available in all schools with canteens as priorities going forward.
- The Kenyan government has highlighted their commitment to improving the access to clean water in schools, as well as to accelerating the deployment of clean cooking technologies, ensuring schools transition from biomass to sustainable energy solutions.
- Ghana's School Feeding Programme (GSFP) covers [over 4 million](#) pupils in public kindergartens and primary schools (around 70 % of public schools nationwide). The Programme integrates WASH through routine monitoring of handwashing facilities, kitchen sanitation and food-safety practices by School Health Education Programme coordinators and Environmental Health Officers.