



School Meals Coalition **Nutrition, Health and Education for Every Child**

Sustainable Financing Initiative **for School Health and Nutrition**

Concept Note

Context

The School Meals Coalition was launched at the United Nations Food Systems Summit in September 2021 under the leadership of Finland and France. More than 65 countries from the global North and South together with more 66 partners (including UN agencies, NGO's, think tanks and academic partners) came together to improve and restore school meals programmes as a transformational platform for food and education systems.

Since its launch, the Coalition has already achieved significant early success. To date, 14 countries have submitted bold and ambitious national commitments to the Coalition and many of them are already implementing actions. For example, President Macky Sall, President of the African Union, was the first President to personally sign the declaration of commitment of the Coalition and has increased the national budget for school feeding in 2022. President Talon of Benin has just announced a national budget commitment of USD 270 million dollars over the next five years to scale up their national programme. President Kagame of Rwanda has committed to scaling up the national school meals programme from 640,000 children today to 3.3 million children in two years.

School feeding programmes are an established part of public policies in a growing number of countries, not only wealthy ones. Research findings have confirmed the wide-ranging and mutually reinforcing benefits generated by such programmes across several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including education, nutrition, child health, social protection, poverty reduction and, through home grown school feeding, rural livelihoods. Yet, despite school meals programmes are an investment generating high social and economic returns, they have a limited reach where they are most needed.

School closures during the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted school feeding programmes for millions of children. As schools re-open, the fiscal space available to governments in many LICs and MICs is shrinking in the face of unsustainable debt and reduced economic growth projections. Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine has triggered a surge in food price inflation. This could simultaneously increase household poverty and child malnutrition while adding to the costs of already under-funded school meal programmes.

As financial pressures on governments mount there is a danger that the current benefits of school feeding will be eroded, and the potential benefits of programme expansion left untapped. That would represent a major setback for the Sustainable Development Goals. An expansion of school feeding programmes could help accelerate progress in learning and provide safety nets for vulnerable children. Moreover, school feeding represents an important link in the food system chain. There is a challenge in deploying more widely such an effective and equitable policy intervention and address the financing issue.

Why a Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition (SFI)?

The Sustainable Financing Initiative (SFI) for school health and nutrition (SFI), one of the five under the School Meals Coalition, is established with the goal of working with governments and donors to research and implement sustainable financing solutions for expanding school feeding programmes.

The SFI will leverage research as well as the expertise and resources of countries, donors, philanthropic and economic actors to improve the financing of school feeding policies and programmes (doing more and better) with a particular focus on low-income and lower-middleincome countries.

The SFI has the following five global objectives which will be carried out over the next 3 years:

- Undertake a landscape analysis of global financing for School Health and Nutrition Programs and explore options currently used for long-term financing in lower- and lower-middle-income countries. The SFI will contribute to improve the understanding of both current levels of financing provision, from domestic and international sources, and the mechanisms that may be available to governments to mobilise new and additional resources;
- Generate additional knowledge and data, especially around funding mechanisms that may help low- and lower-middle-income countries expand, accelerate, and broaden their efforts at national level to build back school-based feeding services;
- Work with one or two countries members of the School Meals Coalition to rethink the financing mechanisms of their national policy for school feeding and identify alternative and more sustainable funding opportunities;
- Identify opportunities for donors to coordinate more effectively around existing funding and co-invest in programs, making the best of the cross-sectoral dimension of school health and nutrition as SHN and in particular school meals programmes may be partially or structurally supported by various sectoral financing: education, health, social protection, agriculture and rural development (in particular home-grown school feeding);
- Share evidence and data collected on financing challenges and options and contribute to the Coalition dissemination and communication strategy to allow countries and investors to fully utilize the information.

How will the SFI work?

As agreed by Coalition member states, the Education Commission leads the Sustainable Financing Initiative and establishes a strong link with the Global Education Forum. 2022 is the year where the organisation, governance mechanisms and way of work of the Initiative will be established. The official launch was convened on July 19, 2022 following the Transforming Education Pre-Summit in June, as school health and nutrition is recognised as one of the most powerful policy to improve children health and learning outcomes.

The SFI relies on the priorities and needs of governments of the Coalition. Partnerships and collective mobilisation are key to its contribution and value-added for sustainable financing. The Initiative works also closely with the other Initiatives of the Coalition, in particular with the Research Consortium and the Monitoring and Data Initiative in order to ensure coherence and complementarity.

Research work and expertise mobilization are expected to feed a limited number of workstreams to which countries and partners members of the Coalition are invited to join. Potential issues to be discussed are: i) Making the best of existing financing resources; ii) Mobilizing additional domestic financing; iii) Mobilizing international resources; iv) Harnessing innovative forms of financing. The Initiative is expected to approach school feeding programmes and policies financing in a strategic and cross-sectoral way, underlined by key principles: i) be context-specific, ii) align on national policies, iii) make the best of cross-sectoral opportunities, iv) contribute to sustainable agrofood systems and the fight against climate change, v) work in partnerships.

A Steering Committee will be put in place in September 2022. It will provide strategic guidance to each of the objectives/ deliverables and contribute to global advocacy, political and technical support for school feeding financing strategies, and provide a peer review of research papers.

The SFI is looking for countries and strategic partners to work with us on research, tools and analysis; informing policy and practice; accelerating the implementation of national policy commitments; and catalyzing global action. It is also looking for strategic funding partners to support the SFI over the next 2-3 years either core funding or specific projects.

Please visit educationcommission.org/cross-sectoral-transformation/ for more information.

Email SFI-SMC@educationcommission.org if you would like to get involved with the work of the SFI.