

FORUM REPORT



global child
nutrition forum

OSAKA, JAPAN

DECEMBER 9 - 12, 2024

School Meal Programs in an Era of Food Systems Transformation

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Introduction



The 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum

The Global Child Nutrition Forum is a premier peer-to-peer learning exchange platform designed to ensure governments and their partners have the knowledge, tools, and connections they need for ensuring all children can access high-quality school meals, contributing to national educational, nutrition and health, agricultural, economic, and social protection goals.

“A plate of food is power in a child's hand.”

- Her Excellency Rachel Ruto, First Lady of the Republic of Kenya

Held in a different country each time, the Global Child Nutrition Forum unites leaders from countries around the world for four days of intensive training, technical assistance and planning, all directed toward establishing country-operated sustainable school feeding programs. By sharing their insights, experiences, and challenges, an informal worldwide alliance of leaders dedicated to advancing school feeding has evolved. As a result, the Forum has become a global catalyst for school feeding development.

Past Global Child Nutrition Forum Locations

- Armenia
- Benin
- Brazil
- Cabo Verde
- Cambodia
- Canada
- Ethiopia
- Ghana
- Kenya
- South Africa
- Tunisia
- United States of America

The 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum was organized by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation in partnership with the International Child Nutrition Japan (ICNJ). ICNJ's mission is to give back to the world through the international sharing of the development and implementation of Japanese school meal and nutrition programs. By arranging school site visits for participants of the Global Child Nutrition Forum, ICNJ took one step closer to supporting governments around the world in implementing high-quality school meal programs.

The following report documents the proceedings of this global event, memorializing the rich engagement of over 400 passionate government representatives and partners who know that a plate of food is power in a child's hand.



Photo credit: Vasundhara Bijalwan



Photo credit: Vasundhara Bijalwan

School Meals in Japan

Japan has a long and storied history with school meals, or “*Kyushoku*” in the Japanese language. The first program started in 1889 at a private school within a Buddhist temple in Tsuruoka City, where priests gathered donated food from the community and served free lunches to children from poor families. This spurred similar programs in cities across Japan shortly thereafter.

School meals were significantly scaled up in the aftermath of World War II, when the country faced severe food shortages and increased rates of childhood malnutrition, leading to the 1954 passage of the national School Lunch Program Act. This Act requires all public elementary and junior high schools to establish and provide safe and nutritious school lunches for all students. As of May 2021, 99.7% of all public elementary schools and 98.2% of all junior high schools provide school meals.



“When students are able to eat local food each school day, it helps them develop an understanding of how their food is produced before it arrives on their plate.”

- Kei Kuriwaki, President of ICNJ and Advisor at GCNF

In June 2005, the Basic Act on Shokuiku was implemented in Japan. Translating roughly as “food and nutrition education”, *Shokuiku* programs are managed by a food and nutrition teacher who also leads on preparing meal menus. This teacher also actively engages with students’ families and shares information around good nutrition. Menus are designed to include a diversity of foods guided by the local seasons.

Students and their families are actively engaged in supporting the program. At lunch time, students set up the classroom as a lunchroom and rearrange their desks as dining tables. At many schools, students also serve meals to their fellow students and lead in cleaning up. Most schools fund the cost of the program’s management while meal ingredients are paid for by parents. Families that are unable to pay are provided an allowance through Japan’s social welfare services.

How School Meals Excel in Japan

- Students and their families are actively engaged in supporting school meal programs.
- Menus are designed to include a diversity of foods guided by the local seasons.
- It is common for schools to serve international meals once a month to introduce students to food and cultures from around the world.

Forum Organizers & Supporters

This year's Forum was organized by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation in partnership with the International Child Nutrition Japan (ICNJ), and in cooperation with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA); the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT); the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF); and the School Meals Coalition (SMC).

Organizers:



GCNF and ICNJ team members

In Cooperation with:



With Generous Support from:

The Forum was made possible thanks to the generous support of The Rockefeller Foundation, Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), Ajinomoto, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Food 4 Education, The Foundation for Fresh Produce, Nakanishi, World Vision, and other partners.

As leading supporter of the 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum, The Rockefeller Foundation ensured that participants arriving from over 80 countries had access to the latest innovations, research, and experiences of scaling up high-quality school meal programs.



Eat Well, Live Well.



With additional support from Edesia and Sanku



82 Countries of
work represented



408 Participants

3 Youth
speakers



70 Speakers and
presenters

featuring 25
governments

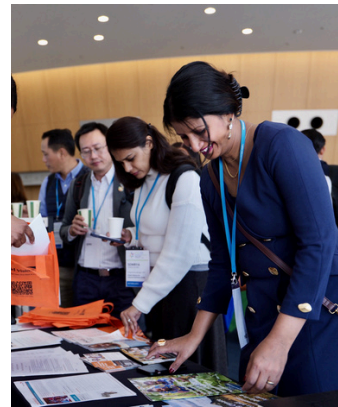


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School
visitsContent was
available in

7

Languages



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Interactive
technical
workshops



Plenary & Workshop Highlights





Day One

- **Opening Ceremony**
- **Plenary** - School Meal Programs in an Era of Food Systems Transformation
- **Lightning Round**
- **Workshop** - Integrating Climate-Smart Strategies for Nutritious Meals and Sustainable Systems
- **Workshop** - Linking School Meals with Holistic Food Education: Cultivating Healthier and More Sustainable Food Practices in Children and School Communities
- **Workshop** - School Meals in Island States – Examples, Opportunities, and Advocacy
- **Workshop** - Life Skills and Food Literacy Program in India
- **Research Poster Reception**

Opening Ceremony

Ms. Arlene Mitchell, Executive Director of the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF), welcomed participants and introduced the Forum's theme, "School Meal Programs in an Era of Food Systems Transformation," highlighting Japan's leadership in school feeding and nutrition education (Shokuiku).

Mr. Okubo Nobuaki, Senior Executive Director at the Osaka Prefectural Board of Education, emphasized the cultural importance of food, table manners, and sustainability.

Mr. Kashiwara Tetsuya, Director of Health Education and Shokuiku Division at Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), reflected on how Japan's School Meal Law, originally enacted to combat malnutrition, has evolved into an educational tool that fosters healthy eating habits and environmental awareness.

Hon. Mizuho Umemura, Member of the House of Councillors of Japan, underlined the role of school meals in encouraging attendance and preserving food culture, acknowledging Japan's post-war struggles and UNICEF's support in rebuilding its school feeding program.

Dr. Nomura Marika, Senior Advisor of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, shared Japan's international contributions to school feeding, including efforts in Madagascar, Mongolia, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and announced a 2025 webinar on improving school meal programs.



Ms. Arlene Mitchell, Executive Director, GCNF



Dr. Teiji Nakamura, President, Japan Dietetic Association



Hon. Mizuho Umemura, Member of the House of Councillors of Japan

Dr. Teiji Nakamura, President of Japan Dietetic Association, highlighted how Japan's model extends beyond nutrition, shaping children's understanding of food culture, sustainability, and responsibility.

Ms. Morishima Chika, Executive Officer & Vice President in charge of Sustainability & Communications of Ajinomoto Co., Inc., provided a private sector perspective in detailing the company's work in improving school nutrition, including model kitchens in Vietnam.

Ms. Betty Kibaara, Director of the Food Initiative at The Rockefeller Foundation, shared her experience as a beneficiary of a school milk program in Kenya, highlighting the transformative power of school meal programs, and emphasized their impact on human capital, local economies, and climate resilience, noting that every \$1 invested yields a \$9 return. She also advocated for school meals as market drivers through local procurement.

Ms. Mary Muinde, Chief of Staff to the First Lady of Kenya, reinforced the role of school meals in increasing school attendance and retention, highlighting Kenya's commitment to expanding sustainable school feeding programs.

Dr. Ronald Kleinman, Board President of GCNF, concluded the session, reaffirming GCNF's commitment to strengthening school meal programs globally, and officially declaring the 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum open.

What We Learned:

- School meal programs improve education, health, and economic development while strengthening community bonds.
- Collaboration and innovation are key to ensuring the long-term sustainability and impact of school feeding initiatives.
- Locally sourced food and sustainable practices help make programs more climate-resilient and gender-inclusive.
- Japan's school meal system has evolved from a post-war necessity to a holistic model integrating nutrition, education, and sustainability.
- Shokuiku is central to Japan's approach, teaching children about nutrition, agriculture, and environmental responsibility.
- Global partnerships are advancing school feeding programs, with countries such as Kenya, Madagascar, Indonesia, and Malaysia benefiting from Japan's expertise.



*Dr. Nomura Marika, Senior Advisor,
Japan International Cooperation Agency*



*Ms. Mary Muinde, Chief of Staff to the
First Lady of Kenya*

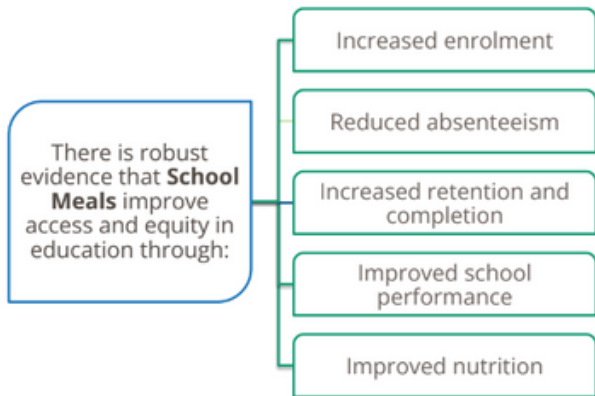
Plenary

School Meal Programs in an Era of Food Systems Transformation

Moderated by **Ms. Asma Lateef**, Chief of Policy and Advocacy Impact at the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2) Advocacy Hub, the panel highlighted the critical role of school meals in advancing health, education, and sustainability.

Hon. Douglas Syakalima, Minister of Education of the Republic of Zambia, emphasized the government's goal to expand coverage to 5 million children, focusing on local sourcing and supporting farmers. **Ms. Mary Carmen Rojas Torres**, National Director of Cuba's Ministry of Education, shared how the country integrates school meals into its education system, engaging local farmers and including nutrition education.

Hon. Madalitso Kambauwa Wirima, Minister of Education of the Republic of Malawi, discussed the nation's efforts to increase coverage from 40% to 100% by 2030, with a focus on climate-resilient crops and smallholder farmer involvement. **Dr. Danny Hunter**, Principal Scientist of the Alliance of Bioversity International and International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), stressed the importance of underutilized plant foods to diversify school meals and improve nutrition. Brazil's leadership in promoting climate-smart, sustainable menus was also noted.



Left: Hon. Douglas Syakalima, Minister of Education of the Republic of Zambia

Right: Ms. Asma Lateef, Chief of Policy and Advocacy Impact at the SDG2 Advocacy Hub

What We Learned:

- School meals are essential for improving children's health and education while promoting sustainable food systems.
- Zambia's focus on local food sourcing supports both nutrition and local farmers.
- Cuba integrates school meals with nutrition education, creating a comprehensive system.
- Malawi aims to expand its school meal program, focusing on climate-resilient crops and smallholder farmers.
- Underutilized plant foods can improve the nutritional quality of school meals and contribute to resilient food systems.

Lightning Round

Professor Qian Zhang, Dean at the National Institute for Nutrition and Health of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, presented China's National Nutrition Improvement Program, which has benefited 35 million rural students by reducing stunting and anemia while addressing emerging challenges such as obesity. She highlighted the structured meal provisions and financial allowances that support child nutrition.



Professor Qian Zhang, Dean at the National Institute for Nutrition and Health of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Mr. Emmanuel Montoia Gonçalves Afonso, National School Feeding Program Coordinator of São Tomé and Príncipe, discussed the country's approach to school feeding, where revenue from business sectors, particularly the cement industry, helps fund meals while also benefiting local farmers. He emphasized the importance of recent seminars and conferences in strengthening school feeding programs through knowledge sharing and collaboration.



Workshop

Integrating Climate-Smart Strategies for Nutritious Meals and Sustainable Systems

Facilitators:

- **Mr. Vinicius Limongi**, Head of Program, WFP Center of Excellence Against Hunger in Brazil
- **Ms. Ana Clara Cathalat**, Program Officer, WFP Center of Excellence Against Hunger in Brazil
- **Ms. Vera Meyer**, Regional School Feeding Adviser, WFP Regional Bureau Bangkok

This session focused on integrating climate-smart strategies into school meal programs to improve sustainability and nutrition. Presenters introduced different country approaches, highlighting the role of local food procurement in strengthening food security and economies. **Ms. Karine Silva dos Santos**, General-Coordinator of Brazil's National School Feeding Program (PNAE), emphasized the impact of school meals in creating market demand for local agricultural products, with smallholder farmer participation increasing from 11% in 2011 to 45% today. She stressed inter-sectoral collaboration as key to this progress.

Mr. Sreng Sophornreaksmey, Director of Policy Department of Cambodia's General Secretariat for National Social Protection Council, discussed how purchasing from smallholder farmers has improved the local economy, provided flexibility to incorporate seasonal foods, and encouraged safer production practices.

Ms. Zainab Mohamed, School Feeding Coordinator of Kenya's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, presented the Smallholder Farmers Aggregated Model, which directs funds to cooperatives rather than individual schools, ensuring procurement of climate-resilient crops and sustainable cooking methods.

Participant discussions centered on real-world case studies, potential solutions such as national-level procurement, investment in climate-smart farming, and innovative funding strategies to support the expansion of school meal programs.



Photo credit: Vasundhara Bijalwan



Photo credit: Vasundhara Bijalwan

Workshop

Linking School Meals with Holistic Food Education: Cultivating Healthier and More Sustainable Food Practices in Children and School Communities

Facilitators:

- **Dr. Fatima Hachem**, Senior Nutrition Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- **Ms. Melissa Vargas**, Technical Advisor for Nutrition Guidelines and Standards, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- **Ms. Nora Hobbs**, Regional Nutrition Advisor Asia-Pacific, WFP
- **Ms. Sinksar Moges**, Nutrition Specialist, UNICEF
- **Ms. Munkhjargal Luvsanjamba**, Nutrition Officer, UNICEF Mongolia
- **Mr. Yemisrach Ahmed Hussen**, Nutrition Officer, UNICEF

This workshop emphasized the importance of integrating school meals with food education to foster healthier and more sustainable food habits among students.

Group discussions focused on identifying challenges, sharing best practices, and using evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the connection between school meals and nutrition education. A group quiz on global food loss and waste engaged participants, reinforcing key messages.

Presenters highlighted that while nutritious meals are provided in schools, they do not always translate to healthier food choices at home. Similarly, teaching nutrition lessons alone does not guarantee that children will prefer nutritious foods. Discussions underlined the need to treat school meals as learning tools, involve students in program monitoring, and extend food education beyond the classroom to families and communities. Participants expressed that meaningful engagement, flexibility, and avoiding interruption during mealtimes are essential to increasing student ownership and acceptance of school meal programs.



Workshop

School Meals in Island States – Examples, Opportunities, and Advocacy

Facilitators:

- **Dr. Sarah Burkhart**, Pacific School Food Network Chair, University of the Sunshine Coast, Research Lead – Nutrition, Health and Food Systems Australian Center for Pacific Islands Research
- **Dr. Danny Hunter**, Principal Scientist, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT
- **Prof. Pragya Singh**, Associate Professor, Nutrition and Dietetics, Fiji National University
- **Ms. Elodie Casey**, Research Associate, Australian Center for Pacific Islands Research
- **Prof. Jun Kobayashi**, Ryukyus University / Chair of Japanese Consortium for Global School Health Research (JC-GSHR) and Chair of Japan Association for Global Health (JAGH)

This session focused on advocating for school meal programs in island states, highlighting the work of the Pacific School Food Network (PSFN) in promoting healthier school food environments. Speakers introduced PSFN's goals of capacity building, policy guidance, and networking, while also addressing the challenges of nutrition transitions, the rise of ultra-processed foods, and the role of schools and churches in shaping food behaviors.

The impact of foreign food on Japan's food culture was discussed, with Okinawa's traditional diet cited as an example of longevity. Participants shared strategies for raising awareness and advocated for local food sourcing, highlighting the challenges of limited agriculture and reliance on imports.

Key takeaways included the importance of using traditional knowledge, diversifying local sourcing, and advocating for policy change to improve school meal programs in the Pacific.



Workshop

Life Skills and Food Literacy Program in India

Facilitators:

- **Ms. Aditi Mehrotra**, Nutrition Advisor, Food Future Foundation, India
- **Ms. Ritu Jawa**, Vice Principal, Lotus Valley International School, India

This workshop explored innovative approaches to food literacy and nutrition education, emphasizing the importance of interactive learning. Participants engaged in hands-on activities inspired by classroom techniques, using the Food Literacy Plus Handbook to explore sensory experiences, identify sounds, and even dance. Group exercises included creating dishes based on assigned food groups, developing and pitching nutritious food products, and identifying Indian spices through smell.



The role of food literacy in empowering students to make informed decisions about their health and environment was highlighted, reinforcing the idea that learning about food should be engaging and enjoyable.



Research Poster Reception

A new addition to this year's Forum was the introduction of a call for research posters. Those who had conducted research or written reports on school meal programs within the past four years had the opportunity to submit key findings to be displayed during the research reception following the conclusion of the first day of the Forum. Unlike traditional research posters, the Forum's "headline posters" were designed to present the main conclusion of a study in 25 words or less.

In total, 25 research posters were accepted and displayed, showcasing key insights on topics ranging from the feasibility and validity of using mobile AI-assisted dietary assessment to monitor school meals and children's diets to the impact of program employment on women's socio-economic status.





Day Two

- **Plenary** - School Meals Around the World: Global Survey of School Meal Programs
- **Plenary** - School Meals on the Global Agenda
- **Lightning Round**
- **Workshop** - Japanese School Meal Program: The History and Shokuiku (Food and Nutrition Education)
- **Workshop** - Creating Demand for Climate-Smart, Nutritious Foods through Home-Grown School Feeding
- **Workshop** - Fortified Whole Grains: A Catalyst for Food Systems Transformation
- **Workshop** - Students as Agents of Change: Engaging Students in Your School Food and Nutrition Programs
- **Plenary** - Regional School Meal Program Updates
- **Lightning Round**
- **Workshop** - McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (U.S. Department of Agriculture): Support for School Meals
- **Workshop** - Japanese School Meal Program: The History and Shokuiku (Food and Nutrition Education)
- **Workshop** - Kitchens - Centralized vs Decentralized: Adapting School Feeding Operations for Efficiency
- **Workshop** - Incorporating a Gender Lens in School Feeding Programs

Plenary

School Meals Around the World: Global Survey of School Meal Programs

In this plenary session, **Dr. Purnima Menon**, Senior Director for Food and Nutrition at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), moderated a discussion on the Global Survey of School Meal Programs, featuring government speakers from Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Jordan, and Guatemala, and the USDA – McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program.

Dr. Wilson Charles Mahera, Deputy Permanent Secretary of Tanzania's Ministry of Education Science and Technology, highlighted the country's efforts to improve school meal programs, focusing on climate-smart interventions and better coordination between government levels.

Ms. Lindsay Carter, Director of the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program of the United States Department of Agriculture, discussed how the Global Survey helps allocate McGovern-Dole funding to the most needed countries, emphasizing the survey data as an important foundation for research and for better understanding the multi-sectoral reach and benefits of school meal programs post-COVID-19.

Ms. Khalida Alsaleh, Head of School Health and Nutrition Unit of Jordan's Ministry of Education, outlined the country's school meal programs, which serve 520,000 students, including Syrian refugees, and noted the integration of local agricultural markets.



Dr. Purnima Menon, Senior Director for Food and Nutrition, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

Dr. Claudia Yadira Garcia, Advisor to the Ministerial Office of Guatemala's Ministry of Education, shared how the Global Survey aids in decision-making and improves their school nutrition programs, underscoring the importance of data-backed action.

Dr. Ganga Dilhani, Director of Education of Sri Lanka's Ministry of Education, discussed the country's school meal program, emphasizing the government's funding and its role in scaling up the program. She also mentioned that Sri Lanka is in the process of implementing a digital data system to improve the collection and use of data for the program, aiming to improve decision-making and policy development. The speakers also reflected on the potential risks of making data public, emphasizing that data should be presented with context and used to inform strategic decisions while mitigating any risks.

The session highlighted the importance of data in improving school meal programs. Speakers emphasized how data from the Global Survey helped shape their countries' decisions and policies. For instance, Tanzania used data to advocate for more support for school meals and to implement School Information Systems to manage meal distribution effectively. Jordan's school meal program leverages data to track progress and inform decision-making. Guatemala's participation in the Global Survey strengthened their credibility and helped them improve their school nutrition initiatives.

What We Learned:



- Countries such as Tanzania, Jordan, and Guatemala rely on data to track the effectiveness of their school meal programs, identify challenges, and guide policy decisions.
- Strong coordination between governments, stakeholders, and local communities is key to successful school meal programs.
- In Tanzania, climate-smart interventions are being implemented to address climate-related challenges in food sourcing and meal sustainability.
- Jordan's school meal program integrates local agricultural markets and provides work opportunities for women in underserved communities.
- The Global Survey of School Meal Programs is essential for identifying funding needs and ensuring resources are allocated effectively.
- Data plays a crucial role in advocacy, as demonstrated by Tanzania's efforts to gain support from parents and regional officials.
- It is important to pair data with narratives to ensure accurate interpretation and effective use.

Plenary

School Meals on the Global Agenda

Mr. Saulo Ceolin, Coordinator-General for Food Security and Nutrition of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, introduced the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, emphasizing that school meal programs are vital for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 (End Poverty) and 2 (End Hunger). The Alliance, launched at the G20 Ministerial Meeting in November 2024, includes 85 countries, multilateral Development Banks, UN organizations, and other partners, offering financial, technical, and knowledge support. Announced commitments included Indonesia's pledge to reach 80 million students with a free nutrition program and the expansion of school meal programs in Nigeria, Benin, and Sierra Leone. Partners also stepped up, with the World Bank aiming to support 500 million people by 2030 and the Inter-American Development Bank allocating USD 25 billion for school meals (2025–2030).



Mr. Saulo Ceolin, Coordinator-General for Food Security and Nutrition of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Afshan Khan, UN Assistant Secretary-General, Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, highlighted the urgency of addressing global malnutrition, with 148 million children stunted or malnourished and rising obesity rates. She noted that school meals improve nutrition, gender equality, and learning outcomes, with the added benefit of sourcing meals locally to support farmers and promote climate-smart agriculture. Japan's school meal program was highlighted as a best practice example.



Ms. Afshan Khan, UN Assistant Secretary-General, Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement

Hon. Briec Pont, Special Envoy for Nutrition and Secretary General for the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit, emphasized in his video message that school meal programs are a crucial investment in long-term resilience, especially in times of economic, health, and food crises. He also highlighted that sustainable and fair food systems help achieve food sovereignty and strengthen resilience in the face of a crisis. Finally, he also underscored the importance of the N4G Summit in Paris as a pivotal moment to drive collective action against malnutrition and accelerate progress toward the 2023 target.



Hon. Briec Pont, Special Envoy for Nutrition and Secretary General for the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit

What We Learned:

- School meal programs are a strategic investment in long-term resilience, contributing to poverty reduction, food security, and economic stability.
- Global initiatives such as the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, the SUN Movement, and the Nutrition for Growth Summit are key in fostering international collaboration to mobilize financial, technical, and policy support to school meal programs.
- School meals address multiple development goals, improving nutrition, gender equality, learning outcomes, and local economies.
- Best practices, such as Japan's school meal model, highlight the role of nutrition education, sustainable sourcing, and holistic approaches in strengthening school feeding programs worldwide.

Lightning Round

Ms. Zulfiya Abdusamatzoda, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection of the Population of the government of Tajikistan, and a highly respected advocate for child well-being in the country, discussed how important school feeding is to the Government of Tajikistan, which has led to annual budgetary increases for school meal initiatives. As of December 2024, more than 450,000 students in Tajikistan general education schools receive one hot meal per day, and 100% of the country's pre-school students receive 3 meals per day.

Ms. Laurence Rycken, Director General, International Dairy Federation (IDF), spoke about the state of milk and milk products in schools around the world, described the role of the International Dairy Federation as the repository of scientific knowledge for the global dairy sector, and introduced their publication (released in September 2024) "*The State of Milk and Milk Products in School Programmes Around the World*". She reported that over 210 million children in 104 countries receive milk or milk products in school meal programs.

Mr. Timothy Boom, Donor Engagement Lead, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), spoke about a partnership of organizations (CRS, Cornell University, and PATH, with support from the USDA McGovern-Dole program) investigating the health benefits of insect-fortified foods in Madagascar. Reporting that edible insects have well known environmental and health benefits and are culturally appropriate in Madagascar and various other countries, he described a pilot project using crackers fortified with black soldier fly larvae that are produced locally. The acceptability phase of the study is complete and preliminary results are positive. The second phase is an acceptability study that will look at health benefits.



Ms. Zulfiya Abdusamatzoda, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan



Ms. Laurence Rycken, Director General, International Dairy Federation (IDF)



Mr. Timothy Boom, Donor Engagement Lead, Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

Workshop

Japanese School Meal Program: The History and Shokuiku (Food and Nutrition Education)

This session was offered twice. These notes are the outcomes of the first offering of this session.

Facilitators:

- **Dr. Takimoto Hidemi**, Director General, National Institute of Health and Nutrition
- **Prof. Fujihara Tatsushi**, Kyoto University
- **Prof. Murayama Nobuko**, Univ. of Niigata Prefecture
- **Prof. Eto Kumi**, Kagawa Nutrition University
- **Ms. Yamamoto Kana**, Diet and Nutrition Teacher at Osaka Education Univ. Ikeda Elementary School

The session explored the history and evolution of Japan's school lunch program, emphasizing its integration with nutrition education and its role in shaping healthy eating habits. Speakers highlighted how school lunches have progressed from basic meals to well-balanced menus, guided by policies such as the School Lunch Program Act and Shokuiku Basic Act.

The program not only provides nutritious meals but also serves as an educational tool, helping students learn about food production, preparation, and sustainability. Japan's approach involves students in food-related activities, from meal preparation to cleanup, reinforcing food education as part of daily life. The program also promotes collaboration between teachers, nutritionists, and local communities to improve students' understanding of healthy diets. Sustainability, cost-sharing, and disparities between municipalities remain challenges, while coordination among ministries, schools, and communities ensures continuous improvement and adaptation to changing food and nutrition needs.

Japan's model has gained international recognition, with partnerships in countries such as Ghana, Bangladesh, and Vietnam to support school meal programs and promote nutrition education.



Workshop

Creating Demand for Climate-Smart, Nutritious Foods through Home-Grown School Feeding

Facilitators:

- **Mr. Francis Mwanza**, GCNF Senior Advisor
- **Mr. Ben Muskovitz**, Senior Policy Advisor, U.S. Department of State, Office of Global Food Security
- **Dr. Olga Cabello**, Senior Nutrition Advisor, U.S. Department of State, Office of Global Food Security
- **Dr. Danny Hunter**, Principal Scientist, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT

The session explored strategies to create demand for climate-smart nutritious foods, emphasizing the integration of local biodiversity into school meal programs and national policies.

Examples included Brazil's pioneering policy recognizing 100 native species and Kenya's approach to home-grown school feeding, which links demand through awareness and education with supply through sustainable agriculture.

The discussion highlighted the need to embed diverse crops into national climate policies to leverage climate finance. Insights from the Philippines showcased the Integrated School Nutrition Model, which improves existing programs by ensuring collaboration across sectors, while Zambia's approach emphasized school feeding, cash transfers, and maternal support, underscoring the importance of multi-sectoral coordination and sustainable funding.

Discussions also examined how national policies, partnerships, and financing mechanisms can support long-term food security and climate resilience.



Workshop

Fortified Whole Grains: A Catalyst for Food Systems Transformation

Facilitators:

- **Mr. David Kamau**, Managing Director, Fortified Whole Grain Alliance
- **Ms. Betty Kibaara**, Director, Food Initiative, The Rockefeller Foundation

The workshop focused on strategies to increase the adoption of fortified whole grains in school feeding programs, their nutritional benefits, and the role of the Fortified Whole Grain Alliance (FWGA) in this transition. It opened with an interactive quiz on fortified grain consumption, followed by discussions on the need for government commitment through mandatory fortification policies, support for local farmers, and public awareness campaigns to address cost challenges and improve consumer acceptance. Participants explored cost-effective ways to integrate fortified whole grains into school meals and the potential of climate-resilient crops such as sorghum and millet.

Key takeaways emphasized a holistic approach, stakeholder collaboration, and policy support to scale up adoption and sustainability.



Workshop

Students as Agents of Change: Engaging Students in Your School Food and Nutrition Programs

Facilitators:

- **Ms. Miriam Shindler**, Program Lead, Children and Young People, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)
- **Ms. Eny Kurnia Sari**, Project Coordinator, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

The workshop focused on student engagement in school food and nutrition programs, highlighting successful youth-led initiatives and strategies to empower students as advocates for healthy eating and sustainable food practices.

A case study from Ethiopia showcased an adolescent-led program using sports, arts, and skills development to improve nutrition and economic opportunities in urban communities.

Another case study from Indonesia explored student-driven nutrition advocacy, where youth influenced food vendors and policymakers to improve meal quality.



Group discussions emphasized the importance of empathy mapping, dietary guidelines, and incorporating home-grown foods in school meals.

Key takeaways included the value of conducting student surveys on nutrition preferences, developing new recipes for both school and home, and integrating policies that promote nutritious food environments in schools.



Plenary

Regional School Meal Program Updates

The plenary session provided an insightful overview of global efforts to improve school meal programs, with panelists sharing key highlights from their respective regions. Moderator **Ms. Anne Sellers**, Technical Director for Education at Catholic Relief Services, emphasized the significant shift in the school feeding landscape, driven by challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

Dr. Fernanda Pacobahyba, President of the National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE) at Brazil's Ministry of Education, discussed the Sustainable School Feeding Network (RAES) network in Latin America and the Caribbean, which promotes universal school meal coverage and local sourcing.

Hon. Dogdurkul Sh. Kendirbaeva, Minister of Education of the Kyrgyz Republic, presented the advancements in school meal programs across Central Asia, focusing on balanced and nutritious menus.

Mr. Peter Defranceschi, Director of Brussels Office of the Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), outlined Europe's SchoolFood4Change project, which engages over 600,000 children in sustainable food initiatives.

Mr. Sophornreaksmey Sreng, Director of Policy Department of Cambodia's General Secretariat for the National Social Protection Council, provided updates from the Southeast Asia School Meals Coalition Summit, highlighting key collaborations for better child nutrition and education.

Dr. Sarah Burkhart, Chair of the Pacific School Food Network and Research lead of the University of the Sunshine Coast, concluded with a focus on the Pacific Islands' efforts to address malnutrition and climate change through school meals.



Photo credit: Vasundhara Bijalwan

What We Learned:



- The RAES network in Latin America and the Caribbean is a key platform for advancing school meal programs with principles of universal coverage, local sourcing, and community participation.
- Central Asia's school meal programs are expanding, with a focus on balanced, locally sourced menus, and strong government commitment.
- Europe's SchoolFood4Change project aims to positively impact over 600,000 children by promoting sustainable procurement and food education.
- The Southeast Asia School Meals Coalition Summit underlined the importance of home-grown school feeding, resilience to shocks, and improved financing mechanisms.
- In the Pacific Islands, despite limited data, there is growing interest in school meal programs, with efforts to connect schools with local food producers and promote cultural connections.

Lightning Round

The session featured a variety of impactful presentations and tributes. **Dr. Lily Bliznashka**, Research Fellow at IFPRI, focused on improving the quality of school meals, emphasizing a holistic approach that spans from planning to implementation and monitoring. She discussed key elements such as meal quality standards, smallholder sourcing, and food safety, as well as the practical challenges of food procurement, pricing, and storage. Additionally, she introduced FRANI, an AI-based tool designed to monitor school meal programs and improve governance through third-party meal verification.

Dr. Sarah Burkhardt, Chair of the Pacific School Food Network, paid tribute to **Ms. Viori Uluiratu** of the Fiji Ministry of Education, remembering her vibrant spirit and lasting impact on those she met.

The session concluded with a heartfelt tribute celebrating the enduring legacy of **Mme Odette Loan** by **S.E. Pr Mariatou Koné**, Minister of Education of Côte d'Ivoire, and **Ms. Alice Martin-Daihirou**, Senior Advisor at GCNF.



Tribute to Ms. Viori Uluiratu of the Fiji Ministry of Education



Tribute to Mme. Odette Loan, Directrice Nationale des Cantines Scolaires de Côte d'Ivoire

Workshop

McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (U.S. Department of Agriculture): Support for School Meals

This session was offered twice. These notes are the outcomes of the first offering of this session.

Facilitators:

- **Ms. Stephanie Hofmann**, McGovern-Dole Program Specialist, USDA
- **Ms. Helen Aufderheide**, McGovern-Dole Program Specialist, USDA
- **Ms. Lindsay Carter**, McGovern-Dole Director, USDA
- **Ms. Diane DeBernardo**, Nutrition Advisor, USDA

The session on the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program emphasized its comprehensive approach to addressing child hunger while improving education. The program's core objectives include reducing hunger, enhancing education, and providing U.S. agricultural commodities, along with financial and technical assistance for school feeding and maternal-child health projects. Key components such as Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), nutrition education, deworming, and local procurement were highlighted as essential for creating sustainable, community-driven solutions.

Presenters also discussed the program's focus on capacity building, country selection criteria based on need and sustainability potential, and its holistic impact on children's development. Notably, the program's legacy of integrating nutrition, education, and health initiatives has reached 50 countries since 2003, benefiting millions of children worldwide.

The session concluded with a strong emphasis on the program's innovative practices and its long-term success through local partnerships and government collaboration.



Workshop

Japanese School Meal Program: The History and Shokuiku (Food and Nutrition Education)

This session was offered twice. These notes are the outcomes of the second offering of this session.

Facilitators:

- **Dr. Takimoto Hidemi**, Director General, National Institute of Health and Nutrition
- **Prof. Fujihara Tatsushi**, Kyoto University
- **Prof. Murayama Nobuko**, Univ. of Niigata Prefecture
- **Prof. Eto Kumi**, Kagawa Nutrition University
- **Ms. Yamamoto Kana**, Diet and Nutrition Teacher at Osaka Education Univ. Ikeda Elementary School

The workshop explored the evolution of Japan's school lunch system and the integration of Shokuiku (food and nutrition education). School meals have a long history in Japan, starting in the late 19th century with free lunches for impoverished children; the national school lunch program began post-WWII.

Key milestones included the 1954 School Lunch Program Act and the 2005 Shokuiku Act. The program was discussed as a tool for both nutrition education and public health. Shokuiku's role in schools was highlighted, emphasizing the integration of nutrition education into the curriculum.

The workshop also addressed challenges such as rising food costs and disparities in access.

Key takeaways included the importance of school lunches in combating malnutrition, reducing socioeconomic disparities, and promoting health and sustainability through Shokuiku for future generations.



Workshop

Kitchens - Centralized vs. Decentralized: Adapting School Feeding Operations for Efficiency

Facilitators:

- **Mr. Shalom Ndiku**, Head of Policy & Partnerships, Food 4 Education
- **Ms. Nicola Okero**, External Relations Officer, Food 4 Education

The workshop addressed questions on how to define an efficient kitchen model, the factors that determine its efficiency, and whether it is possible to identify one efficient model that can be successfully replicated in every location. It delved into the comparison of centralized and decentralized school feeding models, discussing the strengths and challenges of each.

Centralized kitchens, which can efficiently serve large numbers of children with standardized processes, require significant initial investment, face complex logistics, and offer limited flexibility in food variety and cultural preferences. In contrast, decentralized kitchens are more affordable to establish but struggle with maintaining consistent food quality, incur higher operational costs (per student served), and face logistical and infrastructural challenges such as transportation difficulties and oversight across large areas. The choice between models depends on factors such as proximity to schools, the number of children, road infrastructure, socio-economic conditions, and scalability.

Case studies from Kenya and India were shared, illustrating how sustainable school feeding programs are implemented and scaled in these regions, offering insight into the models used to increase the number of learners served.



Photo credit: Vasundhara Bijalwan



Photo credit: Vasundhara Bijalwan

Workshop

Incorporating a Gender Lens in School Feeding Programs

Facilitators:

- **Ms. Adriane Seibert**, Senior Technical Advisor for Nutrition, CRS
- **Ms. Liliane Bigayimpunzi**, Survey Coordinator for Africa, GCNF
- **Ms. Yvonne Ng'ang'a**, Manager, Child Health & Development, CIFF
- **Dr. Abeba Ayele**, Senior Manager, CIFF

The session focused on incorporating a gender lens into school meal programs, addressing key challenges related to labor, training, and compensation for workers, particularly women and vulnerable individuals, who make up the majority of the workforce in this sector. It was emphasized that the quality of school meals suffers when cooks and caterers are inadequately trained or not properly compensated.

The session discussed the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), which helps countries strengthen their education systems through five key pillars: policy frameworks, financial capacity, institutional capacity and coordination, design and implementation, and community roles.

Discussions during the breakout session, moderated by Ms. Ng'ang'a, explored how these pillars could be applied to specific country programs, taking into account national contexts, standards, and aspirations for quality, sustainability, gender, and social inclusion.

Key takeaways included the need for gender equity policies to be embedded in national institutions to foster cross-sector coordination, the importance of deliberate policies to address systemic inequities, and the value of learning from countries like Japan that have made significant strides in addressing gender equity.

Additionally, it was noted that the quality of school meals is directly impacted by the recognition and fair treatment of those involved in meal preparation and delivery, and that gender equity policies play a crucial role in shaping both the meal programs and the treatment of workers.





Day Three

- **Plenary** - Domestic Financing – What We Are Learning
- **Plenary** - Sustaining Programs into the Future
- **Workshop** - Using Your Global Survey Results
- **Workshop** - McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (U.S. Department of Agriculture): Support for School Meals
- **Workshop** - The Journey of Large-Scale Food Fortification, Solutions to Enable Access
- **Workshop** - Local Ingredients, Global Impact: The Future of School Meals through Local and Regional Procurement
- **Plenary** - Initiatives Making a Difference
- **Workshop** - Leveraging School Feeding Programs to Build Local Economies and Nutritious Food Systems
- **Workshop** - Using Your Global Survey Results
- **Workshop** - Power Lunch: ‘Fueling School Meals with Fortification – Innovating for a Healthier Future’
- **Workshop** - Does Your School Meal Quality Measure Up? Why Checking Nutritional Quality Along the School Meal Value Chain Matters

Plenary

Domestic Financing— What We Are Learning

The session on domestic financing explored how governments are funding school meal programs, the challenges they face, and innovative approaches to securing sustainable financing. The session, moderated by **Ms. Marie Evane Tamagnan**, Senior Operations Advisor of the Education Division at the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), highlighted the findings from the 2024 Global Survey of School Meal Programs. She emphasized that while low-income countries often rely on external resources, Latin America leads in domestic financing, with nearly all funding coming from government sources. She also discussed how inflation has impacted food prices and school meal budgets worldwide.



Dr. Soo-Youn Kim, Team leader at the Korea Educational Environments Protection Agency



Ms. Betty Kibaara, Director of the Food Initiative at The Rockefeller Foundation



Ms. Dara Phakonekham, Director General of the Department of Finance of Lao Republic's Ministry of Education and Sports

Dr. Soo-Youn Kim, Team leader at the Korea Educational Environments Protection Agency, provided insights into Korea's well-established school meal program, which has evolved from a disaster relief initiative into a universal system covering nearly all students, supported by government subsidies, parental contributions, and strict regulatory standards.

Ms. Betty Kibaara, Director of the Food Initiative at The Rockefeller Foundation, emphasized the importance of diversifying funding sources, citing examples from Guatemala, India, and Brazil, where "sin" taxes, lottery revenues, and private sector contributions help finance school meals.

Ms. Dara Phakonekham, Director General of the Department of Finance of Lao Republic's Ministry of Education and Sports, shared Laos' experience in maintaining its school meal program despite economic challenges, stressing the need for multi-sector collaboration and government commitment to sustain funding for over 130,000 students across more than 1,800 schools.

Dr. Fernanda Pacobahyba, President of the National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE) of Brazil's Ministry of Education, underlined the importance of long-term sustainability, calling for expanded financial commitments and multi-donor collaboration to strengthen school meal programs.

Mr. Tarik Taye, Manager of Child Health & Development at the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), discussed how innovative financing and partnerships are crucial for mobilizing resources, particularly in Africa, where achieving universal coverage requires a combined effort from governments, international organizations, and local communities.



Mr. Tarik Taye, Manager of Child Health & Development at the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF)

The session concluded with a strong call for optimizing existing resources, strengthening public-private partnerships, and ensuring that school meal programs receive consistent and adequate funding to support children's health, learning, and development.

What We Learned:



- Domestic financing is crucial for sustaining school meal programs.
- Countries like Brazil and Mexico demonstrate how multi-level government funding can improve meal quality and accountability.
- Korea's school meal program stands out for its strong regulatory framework, nearly universal coverage, and focus on nutrition education.
- Innovative financing mechanisms, such as "sin" taxes, lottery revenues, and community contributions, help diversify funding sources.
- Multi-sector collaboration and evidence-based advocacy are essential for securing long-term investment in school feeding.
- Expanding partnerships and optimizing available resources can help countries move toward universal school meal coverage.

Plenary

Sustaining Programs into the Future

The session on sustaining school meal programs highlighted the importance of policy integration, financial independence, and community engagement for long-term success. The session's moderator, **Ms. Theresa Becchi**, Associate Director of Resilient Food Systems at Counterpart International, highlighted that 72% of countries now have dedicated budget lines for school feeding, with 61% having national coordination bodies, and there's a growing trend in home-grown school feeding initiatives.

Mr. Karma Wangchuk, Chief of the Career Education and Counseling Division of Bhutan's Ministry of Education and Skills Development, shared Bhutan's transition from the World Food Program (WFP) support to government-managed school meals, now serving over 90,000 children, while involving local communities in food preparation.

Mr. Sidaty Ine Bouye, Director of School Nutrition and Health Department of Mauritania's Ministry of National Education, discussed the country's evolving program, focusing on government and WFP support for sustainability.

Ms. Arlinda Chaquisse, National Director of Nutrition and School Health of Mozambique's Ministry of Education and Human Development emphasized the country's School Feeding Strategy (2023-2032), which strengthens legal and political frameworks to mobilize resources and expand the program, while facing challenges in securing partnerships.

Representing the private sector, **Mr. João de Matos Viegas**, Director of Empresa Carrinho, in Angola, stressed the importance of evidence-based advocacy and community engagement in sustaining school meal programs.



Ms. Arlinda Chaquisse, National Director of Nutrition and School Health of Mozambique's Ministry of Education and Human Development



Mr. Karma Wangchuk, Chief of the Career Education and Counseling Division of Bhutan's Ministry of Education and Skills Development



Mr. Sidaty Ine Bouye, Director of School Nutrition and Health Department of Mauritania's Ministry of National Education

What We Learned:



- Financial sustainability is crucial, with many countries securing national budget lines and fostering inter-sectoral coordination.
- Home-grown school feeding supports local economies and strengthens food security.
- Evidence-based advocacy and community engagement are vital for garnering long-term support.
- Policy frameworks, like Mozambique's strategy, are essential for sustainable school meal programs.
- School meal programs can remain resilient despite challenges with proper planning and government commitment.

Workshop

Using Your Global Survey Results

This session was offered twice. These notes are the outcomes of the first offering of this session.

Facilitators:

- **Ms. Shivani Gharge**, Research Coordinator, GCNF
- **Ms. Liliane Bigayimpunzi**, Survey Coordinator: Africa, GCNF
- **Mr. Moses Collins Ekwueme**, Survey Associate: Africa, GCNF

In the workshop, participants discussed practical applications of the Global Survey results for their countries.

A hypothetical example of Country 1 illustrated how the data could be used to sustain progress, with an emphasis on integrating central government efforts with smallholder farmers. In contrast, Country 2 highlighted the challenges faced in addressing crises such as conflicts in Sudan and Ukraine, which strain resources and complicate program management, particularly with the influx of refugees.

For many, it was the first time they had closely examined the data they had contributed to the Survey. Key takeaways included using the data to involve the private sector in discussions, strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems, and planning the creation of a high-level school feeding community to improve collaboration and sustainability.



Workshop

McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (U.S. Department of Agriculture): Support for School Meals

This session was offered twice. These notes are the outcomes of the second offering of this session.

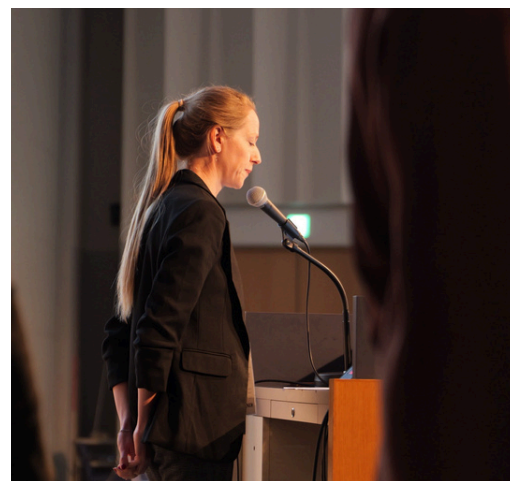
Facilitators:

- **Ms. Stephanie Hofmann**, McGovern-Dole Program Specialist, USDA
- **Ms. Helen Aufderheide**, McGovern-Dole Program Specialist, USDA
- **Ms. Lindsay Carter**, McGovern-Dole Director, USDA
- **Ms. Diane DeBernardo**, Nutrition Advisor, USDA

The session speakers presented an overview of the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, explaining how school feeding and nutrition projects are carried out by nonprofits, WFP, and other organizations. USDA invites proposals annually through the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), selecting priority countries based on need, political stability, and commitment to school feeding. The program focuses on sustainability, ensuring communities can continue the activities after USDA assistance ends, often with support from local governments.

Panel discussions highlighted Cambodia and Timor-Leste, both countries not initially on the priority list. Cambodia's program aims to transition management to the Ministry of Education by 2028, while Timor-Leste's program has fostered multi-sectoral coordination and increased funding per student.

Key takeaways included the scope of McGovern-Dole's impact, with 50 active projects in 34 countries valued at over \$1.1 billion, and the focus on sustainability and local government involvement.



Workshop

The Journey of Large-Scale Food Fortification, Solutions to Enable Access

Facilitators:

- **Mr. Arvind Betigeri**, WFP, Regional Food Fortification Advisor, Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific
- **Ms. Nora Hobbs**, Regional Lead for Nutrition, WFP Asia Pacific, WFP
- **Ms. Kai Lin Ek**, Head of Science Translation and Advocacy, Asia Pacific (APAC), DSM
- **Ms. Judy Boucek**, Nutrition Improvement Segment Lead, Asia Pacific (APAC), DCM

The session on large-scale food fortification, particularly rice fortification, highlighted critical challenges and solutions for scaling up these efforts.

Speakers emphasized the importance of fortification in addressing micronutrient deficiencies, demonstrating the process of mixing Fortified Rice Kernels (FRKs) with non-fortified rice in a ratio of 1:100 to create fortified rice with identical taste, aroma, and texture.

A group exercise explored issues such as institutionalization of post-harvest rice fortification, scaling up with imported inputs versus domestic supply, and the benefits and challenges of both approaches. Panelists from countries actively fortifying rice shared their experiences, and the session underlined the need for a holistic approach involving collaboration with governments, private sector, and NGOs.



Photo credit: Vasundhara Bijalwan

Workshop

Local Ingredients, Global Impact: The Future of School Meals through Local and Regional Procurement

Facilitators:

- **Ms. Caitlin Welte**, Local and Regional Procurement Advisor, CRS
- **Mr. Richard Ndou**, Chief of Party, World Vision
- **Mr. Mangani Banda**, Commodities Manager, World Vision
- **Mrs. Precious Mubanga**, Senior Manager, Food Security & Livelihoods Sector, World Vision

In this session, speakers discussed the importance of local and regional procurement (LRP) in school meals programs.

Participants were divided into groups and tasked with creating a simplified local procurement strategy for a school meals program, addressing areas such as commodity selection, supplier selection, food safety, quality control, transportation, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement, all within a budget of US\$1,500,000 annually.

After presenting their strategies, the teams engaged in an intense discussion, sharing experiences from their respective contexts.

Speakers then shared their insights on implementing successful local procurement programs. Key takeaways included the need for a clear understanding of the steps involved in incorporating locally procured foods into school meals and the importance of adapting strategies to each unique context.



Plenary

Initiatives Making a Difference

In the "Initiatives Making a Difference" plenary session, moderated by **Ms. Beatrice Wamey**, President of Nascent Solutions, speakers highlighted various successful school meal programs and their transformative impacts on children and communities.

Hon. Raissa Malu Dinanga, Minister of Education of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, emphasized the importance of school feeding for the future of children and the economy, outlining the government's commitment to making it a national priority despite limited resources.

Ms. Wawira Njiru, Founder and CEO of Food 4 Education, shared the growth of the organization, which feeds 450,000 children across Kenya and sources all food locally, thus supporting the local economy and creating jobs.

Ms. Meti Tamrat, Director of Public & International Relations of Addis Ababa's Office of the Mayor, in Ethiopia, presented the Home-Grown School Feeding program, highlighting its success in improving attendance and academic performance, as well as its strong economic returns.

Mr. Adeeb Qasem, Director of Economic Development Initiatives of the HSA Group in Yemen, discussed Yemen's School Milk Initiative, which improved child cognition, especially in conflict areas, while **Ms. Miriam Shindler**, Program Lead of Children and Young People at GAIN, emphasized the need to listen to children's preferences when designing school meals to ensure acceptance.



*Ms. Beatrice Wamey, President of
Nascent Solutions*



*Ms. Miriam Shindler, Program Lead
of Children and Young People at
GAIN*



*S.E. Pr. Mariatou Koné, Minister of
Education of Côte d'Ivoire*

Finally, **S.E. Pr. Mariatou Koné**, Minister of Education of Côte d'Ivoire, spoke about the country's extensive school canteen program and the importance of involving women in school feeding and agricultural initiatives, despite challenges in financing and coordination. The session underlined the critical role of school feeding programs in improving child nutrition, education, and economic outcomes.



Ms. Meti Tamrat, Director of Public & International Relations of Addis Ababa's Office of the Mayor

What We Learned:



- School feeding programs are vital for improving child nutrition, education, and supporting vulnerable communities.
- Strong partnerships, both local and international, are essential for scaling these programs and ensuring sustainability.
- Actively listening to children's feedback is key to improving meal quality and ensuring acceptance.
- School feeding initiatives bring significant economic benefits, with high returns on investment.
- Empowering women in both school feeding and agriculture is critical to program success.
- Governments must prioritize school feeding programs as national policy and find innovative solutions to overcome financing and logistical challenges.

Workshop

Leveraging School Feeding Programs to Build Local Economies and Nutritious Food Systems

Facilitators:

- **Mr. Taylor Quinn**, Executive Director, Tailored Food
- **Mr. Ravinder Grover**, Global Business Manager, HarvestPlus Solutions
- **Mr. Benjamin Uchitelle-Pierce**, Manager, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), HarvestPlus Solutions

This workshop highlighted various strategies for integrating local food systems into school meal programs, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among farmers, teachers, food entrepreneurs, and parents. Farmers play a crucial role by supplying fresh, healthy produce and providing hands-on learning experiences for students. Teachers contribute by incorporating nutrition education, school gardens, and health practices into their lessons, enhancing student engagement and increasing school attendance. Food entrepreneurs benefit from the business opportunities that school meal programs offer, while parents are empowered through their involvement in meal preparation, advocating for cultural inclusion, and contributing to community unity.



The workshop also featured a Nutri School initiative that harnesses climate-smart biofortified crops, like high-iron millet and high-calcium sorghum, to improve nutrition. The initiative focuses on empowering women, engaging youth for nutrition education, and using innovative technology to track progress and engage children in healthy habits. It demonstrated how such initiatives can scale to reach thousands of children while providing nutritious, locally acceptable meals.

Workshop

Using Your Global Survey Results

This session was offered twice. These notes are the outcomes of the second offering of this session.

Facilitators:

- **Ms. Shivani Gharge**, Research Coordinator, GCNF
- **Ms. Liliane Bigayimpunzi**, Survey Coordinator: Africa, GCNF
- **Mr. Moses Collins Ekwueme**, Survey Associate: Africa, GCNF

The session provided participants with an opportunity to explore how survey data can be used to strengthen school feeding programs.

Participants engaged in discussions prompted by key questions about the survey results: What specific insights resonate most with your priorities? Who in your country should hear about these results, and how can they be used? What actions are needed to implement changes based on these results?

The responses highlighted that survey data can inform decisions on improving school meal coverage, particularly in terms of sustainability, funding, and extending coverage to secondary schools. Countries also shared their plans to use the data for resource mobilization, advocacy, and developing future school feeding plans.

Key takeaways from the session included the importance of presenting the survey results to relevant government ministries and stakeholders, setting realistic targets, and building partnerships. Discussions emphasized the need to increase domestic financing, engage the private sector, and ensure school feeding programs are linked to local agriculture. Participants also highlighted the significance of annual plans, setting indicators for progress, and advocating for more funding to support school feeding initiatives.



Workshop

Power Lunch: ‘Fueling School Meals with Fortification – Innovating for a Healthier Future’

Facilitators:

- **Ms. Miriam Shindler**, Program Lead, Children and Young People, GAIN
- **Ms. Rachel Temoi**, Head of Development, Sanku
- **Mr. Nelson Mwangi**, Communications and External Relations Manager, Sanku
- **Ms. Sowrya Kilaru**, Program Manager, GAIN

The session focused on the importance of small-scale fortification at the community level, particularly for rural populations with lower production volumes.

Participants learned that fortification can be done using simple technology, with a focus on local foods. Maize, which constitutes a large portion of the diet in vulnerable communities, presents challenges in fortification, especially when processed in non-industrial mills. The session highlighted the importance of engaging local communities in the process and motivating producers with strategies such as unique packaging to incentivize fortification. However, it was noted that such strategies may not work universally, as seen in the differing responses between Tanzania and Kenya.

The facilitators also discussed the impact of global events, such as the war in Ukraine, on the availability of fortification premixes, and how climate shocks contribute to nutrient deficiencies in food.

A key takeaway was the need for affordable fortification solutions and innovative approaches to improve school meals, along with upskilling local millers and staff in new fortification technologies. Participants engaged in group activities to design fortified school feeding programs and explore practical solutions for tackling malnutrition in schools.



Workshop

Does Your School Meal Quality Measure Up? Why Checking Nutritional Quality Along the School Meal Value Chain Matters

Facilitators:

- **Ms. Winnie Bell**, Senior Technical Advisor, Intake Center for Dietary Assessment
- **Ms. Melissa Vargas**, Technical Advisor, FAO
- **Ms. Fatima Hachem**, Senior Nutrition Officer, FAO
- **Ms. Gloria Folson**, Senior Research Fellow, University of Ghana

The session focused on the critical role of measuring nutritional quality along the school meal value chain. The speakers introduced key tools and strategies for assessing the nutrition of school meals, emphasizing the importance of setting clear nutritional standards and the challenges of measuring quality.

A group exercise led participants to share personal experiences with school meals, revealing the variation in meal quality across countries and generations. The discussion included the risks associated with inconsistent monitoring and the mismatch between planned and served meals.

The session concluded with practical solutions such as standardized menus, improved supply chain management, and consultation with nutritionists to improve meal quality. The introduction of the FRANI app, an AI-based tool for tracking food choices and promoting healthy diets, was also highlighted as a promising innovation for improving nutrition data collection and monitoring. Participants left with a better understanding of the challenges and solutions for ensuring the nutritional adequacy of school meals.



Photo credit: Vasundhara Bijalwan



Day Four

- **Plenary** - Japan's School Meals: Present
- **School Visits Debrief: Exchange Learnings**
- **Closing Ceremony**
- **Gala Dinner**

Plenary

Japan's School Meals: Present

The plenary session on *Japanese School Meal Program: The History and Shokuiku (Food and Nutrition Education)* explored the evolution and structure of Japan's school meal system.

Mr. Kei Kuriwaki, Representative Director of ICNJ and **Prof. Nobuko Murayama**, Vice-President of the University of Niigata Prefecture, provided an in-depth analysis of funding mechanisms, including the division of costs between parents (food ingredients) and the government (infrastructure, personnel, and operations). They introduced the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) model, where private companies help design and manage meal facilities under long-term contracts to improve efficiency and sustainability. The session also examined Japan's *School Meal Act*, which establishes seven core targets to promote health, environmental awareness, and appreciation for food. The *Shokuiku* program was highlighted as a key component, integrating nutrition education with cultural and environmental consciousness.



Mr. Kei Kuriwaki, Representative Director of ICNJ

6 Targets of Shokuiku

- Promotion of public health
- Dissemination of knowledge about food
- Fostering rich humanity and social skills
- Gratitude for nature and development of environmental awareness
- Gratitude for producers and labor
- Preservation of local and traditional cultures



Dr. Kazuko Ogasahara, Associate General Manager of the Global Communication Department at Ajinomoto

The session concluded with a school visit orientation, led by **Mr. Tetsuhiko Yoshikawa**, from ICNJ, and **Dr. Kazuko Ogasahara**, Associate General Manager of the Global Communication Department at Ajinomoto, who outlined key aspects to observe during school visits, such as meal quality, portion sizes, hygiene standards, and sustainability practices.

What We Learned:

- Japan's school meal funding model splits costs between parents (food) and the government (operations and personnel).
- The School Meal Act promotes not only nutrition but also environmental education and cultural appreciation.
- The Shokuiku program integrates food education into daily school life, fostering gratitude for food and its producers.
- The PFI model enables private-sector involvement in meal facility management, improving efficiency.
- Despite the structured system, financial disparities exist between municipalities, affecting free school meal accessibility.
- School meal programs emphasize sustainability, with local sourcing and food presentation playing key roles in student engagement.

School Visits Debrief: Exchange Learnings

The session provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on their firsthand experiences visiting Japanese schools and observing their meal programs. Many were impressed by Japan's deep cultural appreciation for food, as well as the structured and inclusive approach to school meals.

A participant from India described their lunch experience at Nakanoshima School as “the happiest lunch I’ve ever had in Japan,” while representatives from Bangladesh were moved by the kindness and organization of the students, even witnessing a student stepping in to translate for a teacher.

Participants from Mongolia and Laos admired how nutrition education is seamlessly integrated into the school day, with children not only learning about food but also actively participating in serving meals. Similarly, a visitor from Armenia highlighted Japan's rigorous food safety standards, contrasting them with more relaxed practices in other countries.

*“The happiest lunch
I’ve ever had in Japan!”*

- Nakanoshima school visit
participant



Many participants also noted Japan's holistic approach to child development, where nutritionists play a crucial role in shaping school meals, training teachers, and ensuring that lunchtime is a structured learning experience.

Nepalese representatives viewed Japan's school meal system as a role model, while those from Mali appreciated its inclusive nature, particularly the engagement of diverse teaching staff. The visits also provided cultural insights, from learning how post-war parental advocacy shaped the modern school meal system to observing innovative practices like school radio announcements for lunch.



Across all reflections, there was a shared admiration for Japan's modern infrastructure, strong sense of care for children, and the joyful way students engaged with their meals. These observations left participants inspired to bring elements of Japan's approach back to their home countries, reinforcing the importance of cultural values, nutrition education, and student involvement in school meal programs.

“I am in shock. I don't know where we are going to start [in my country], but I am inspired!”

- Kansai school visit participant



Closing Ceremony

The Closing Ceremony, moderated by **Ms. Arlene Mitchell**, Executive Director of GCNF, featured reflections from distinguished speakers, emphasizing the forum's role in advancing global child nutrition and education.

Ms. Lindsay Carter, Director of USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program, underlined the importance of the Forum as a platform for collaboration, while **Mr. Daniel Balaban**, Director of the UN's World Food Program (WFP) Center of Excellence against Hunger, celebrated the Forum's growth over the years and urged participants to prioritize school meals as a tool for addressing hunger and poverty.

Dr. Radha Karnad, Director of Child Health & Development – Africa at the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), highlighted the significance of school feeding in Africa and shared CIFF's innovative funding initiatives.

Youth representatives, namely the students **Runchi Kibaara**, **Diana Farzaliyeva**, and **Gabrielle Mitchell**, spoke of their commitment to advocating for inclusive, nutritious school meal programs.



Mr. Daniel Balaban, Director of the UN's World Food Program (WFP) Center of Excellence against Hunger



Dr. Radha Karnad, Director of Child Health & Development – Africa at the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF)



Mr. Sakata Susumu, Councillor (Deputy Director-General, Food Safety and Consumer Affairs Bureau) at Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), shared Japan's success in integrating food education into school meals, and **Mr. Himeno Tsutomu**, Representative of the Government of Japan and Ambassador for the Kansai Region at the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) announced the Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9) in 2025.



Dr. Ronald Kleinman, GCNF Board President



Mr. Himeno Tsutomu, Representative of the Government of Japan and Ambassador for the Kansai Region at the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)

Dr. Ronald Kleinman, GCNF Board President, closed the Forum by thanking participants, sponsors, and donors, challenging attendees to take concrete actions inspired by the Forum discussions, and reaffirming the shared commitment to ensuring every child's right to nutritious meals and education.



Gala Dinner & Cultural Celebration

To celebrate the 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum, participants gathered for a Gala Dinner, featuring an interactive performance by Ninjas and traditional Japanese music. The event provided an energizing atmosphere of camaraderie for participants to reflect on the Forum's success.





School Visits



School Visits

Japan was chosen to host the 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum because of its outstanding school meal program. The Forum provided participants with the opportunity to visit a local school during lunchtime. Participants were divided into groups and visited one of five schools to see the program in action.

These visits provided a firsthand look at how Japan's school meal program embodies the principles of *shokuiku*—a food education philosophy that promotes lifelong healthy eating habits, gratitude for food, and an understanding of nutrition, culture, and sustainability.

By stepping into Japanese schools, engaging with students, and observing mealtime rituals, participants gained valuable insights into a model that prioritizes both health and holistic food education. Interacting with children and educators deepened their appreciation for how Japan integrates school meals into daily learning and demonstrated the role of school meal programs in fostering healthier communities.

Japan's school meal programs are an integral part of students' education, with carefully planned, nutritionally balanced meals that reflect seasonal and local ingredients.



What is *Shokuiku*?



In 2005, the national government enacted the "Basic Act on Shokuiku," solidifying food and nutrition education as a national priority.

Shokuiku is rooted in the understanding that "food and nutrition" play a crucial role in children's development, both physically and intellectually.

Shokuiku aims to educate individuals, empowering them to make informed choices and develop healthy dietary habits for life. It's implemented through discussions about nutrition and food culture and hands-on activities.

Ishoshima Elementary School

Nineteen participants visited Isoshima Elementary School, which was founded 52 years ago and serves 350 students. The school is known for its commitment to diversity education, fostering an environment where students learn to appreciate each other's individuality. Its principal actively engages with students, even greeting them in foreign languages, reflecting the school's global perspective. Located near Kansai Gaidai University of Foreign Languages, the school occasionally collaborates with internship students from the university, further enriching its international approach to learning.

Upon arrival, participants put on shoe covers before entering the school and gathered for a group photo. They then moved to the library room for a session on food and nutrition with two 5th-grade classes. The students, eager to practice their English, presented information on the topic and looked forward to exchanging basic conversations with the visitors.

For lunch, students picked up their meals, delivered from an offsite central kitchen, and brought them to their classrooms for service. Participants joined the students for lunch.

Known for its
international approach
to learning and focus on
global perspectives



19
Participants

350
Students



Kansai University, Elementary School

Over 250 participants visited Kansai University Elementary School, a private institution affiliated with Kansai University. The school serves 370 students across grades 1 through 6 and features its own kitchen, ensuring that the quality of its school lunches matches that of public schools.

The visit began in the school gym, where participants sat by language groups and received headsets for translation. The school provided an overview of its meal program, including a presentation by the school nutritionist. A brief Q&A session followed.

Participants then moved into classroom areas in small groups, putting on provided shoe covers before entering. They observed students as they prepared and enjoyed lunch, gaining insight into the daily routines and structured approach to mealtime.

Onsite kitchen to ensure meals match the quality of public schools

250+
Participants

370
Students



Kinya Elementary School

Nineteen participants visited Kinya Elementary School, a recently established institution now in its third year. The name "Kinya," chosen through a public proposal process and a student vote, reflects the area's deep historical roots dating back to the 9th century and honors the legacy of the former schools from which Kinya was established.

Kinya Elementary serves 400 students across grades 1 through 6 and is currently experimenting with universal free school meals. With a planned move to a new building in two years, the school operates under its guiding motto: "Renew Daily, Learn Independently, Grow with Heart, and Be Resilient."

The visit began with participants gathering to take a group photo. After putting on shoe covers, they then joined two 6th-grade classes for a session on food and nutrition, where students presented information in English, a skill they had been practicing in preparation for the visit.

At lunchtime, students picked up their meals, which were delivered from an offsite central kitchen, and brought them to their classrooms for service. Participants were able to take part in lunchtime and interact with the students while eating.

Currently
experimenting
with **universal
free** school
meals



19
Participants

400
Students



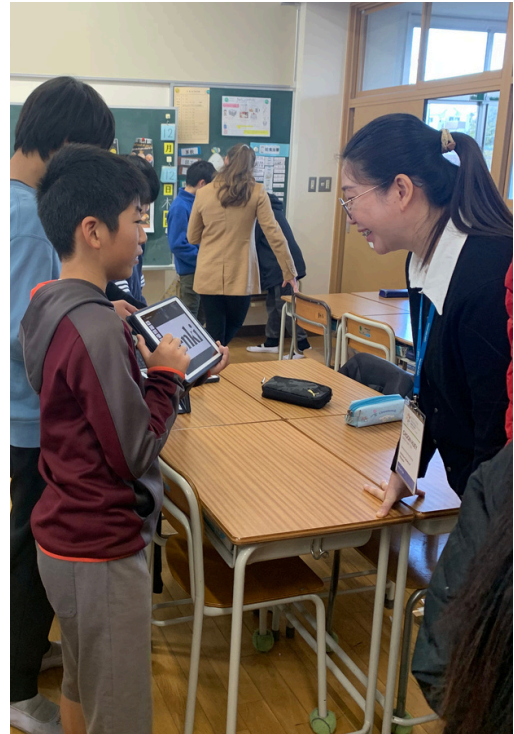
Kouri Elementary School

Thirty-five participants visited Kouri, which celebrated its 79th anniversary in 2024. The school serves 718 students across grades 1 through 6, with five dedicated cooking staff preparing nutritious meals in the onsite kitchen.

Participants first put on shoe covers and then visited 4 classrooms and engaged in discussions on food and nutrition with 5th-grade students, who shared their knowledge and perspectives. The children showcased their English skills, presenting information they had been practicing in preparation for the visit.

Students picked up their meals, delivered from the school's central kitchen, and brought them to their classrooms for lunch time. Participants had the opportunity to share a meal with the students, experiencing not just the food but also the structured, community-oriented approach to school mealtime.

Five **dedicated cooking staff** prepare nutritious meals in the onsite kitchen



35
Participants

718
Students



Nakanoshima Elementary School

Thirty-eight participants visited Nakanoshima Elementary School, a newly established public school that opened in April 2024. The school was created in response to a severe classroom shortage in central Osaka, driven by urban migration. The school's curriculum integrates English education with a focus on globalization and career education, developed in collaboration with corporations and other organizations.

Participants began the visit by joining a nutrition education class with first graders, where they observed coloring activities related to dietary education. The materials focused on visually engaging content to help young students understand nutrition concepts in an accessible way. This session also included simple exchanges with students, allowing for cultural interaction.

A key highlight of the visit was the opportunity to view the onsite kitchen. Participants then split into two different classrooms to observe and enjoy lunch with students, experiencing the structured mealtime routine. Lunch portions were adjusted according to grade level—first graders received smaller portions, while older students had larger servings.



Curriculum includes English lessons with a focus on **globalization and career education**

38
Participants

420
Students



Seiwa Elementary School

Twenty-three participants visited Seiwa Elementary School, a historic institution celebrating its 137th anniversary in 2024. The school serves 951 students and is guided by a strong educational philosophy that emphasizes cherishing each child and fully developing their potential. Seiwa fosters a learning environment where students grow together, developing an appreciation for diverse cultures. With the motto "Let's learn diligently, Seiwa students!", the school prepares its students to collaboratively shape the future.

Guided by a **strong educational philosophy** that emphasizes cherishing each child and fully developing their potential

The visit began with a greeting from the principal, followed by putting on shoe covers and moving to the gym for a group photo. In the gym, participants attended a Shokuiku session in Japanese and received a School Lunch Newsletter before engaging in a Q&A session. Participants then had the opportunity to observe the school kitchen.

A highlight of the visit was an interaction with 2nd-grade students, where the children asked questions about school lunch and food culture in other countries.

Participants then enjoyed lunch in the activity room, followed by a lunch tour where they observed the food delivery process from the preparation room to the classroom, the distribution of meals within the classroom, and a related broadcast about the meal service.



23
Participants

951
Students





Impact & Next Steps



Leveraging the Communiqué

The Forum developed and ratified a communiqué through a participatory process outlining the priorities of participants. This document serves as a rallying point for school meal program advocacy and policy around the world and aims to support the objectives of the School Meals Coalition (SMC) and the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit.

Preamble

The 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum was organized by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) in cooperation with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA); the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT); the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF); the School Meals Coalition; and International Child Nutrition Japan.

Held in Osaka, Japan in December 2024, the Forum brought together 408 participants. Arriving from 82 countries around the world, participants ranged from officials from government and multilateral institutions to representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the business sector, academics, and researchers. In an effort to recognize and document the voices, priorities, and needs of participants, each day participants were provided with prompts designed to elicit information from two distinct groups: 1) government representatives and 2) partners (NGOs, private sector, academia, other). This document is developed to serve as a rallying point for school meal program advocacy and policy around the world. The communiqué development process was facilitated by **Mr. Eric Mitchell**, President, Alliance to End Hunger.

Theme: School Meal Programs in an Era of Food Systems Transformation



Mr. Eric Mitchell, President, Alliance to End Hunger



Voices of Governments

From 2022 to 2024, the majority of governments observed an increase in the quality of their school meal programs.

There are things that hinder or prevent governments from maintaining or improving the quality of their school meal programs, including:

- Insufficient inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration.
- Unstable funding.
- Limited infrastructure (such as adequate kitchens, storage spaces, and transport).
- Home-grown school feeding is not always an available option due to limited supply of quality food, due to a number of factors:
 - Climatic shocks make it difficult to produce all the foods needed for local purchases.
 - Limited capacity of actors across value chains.
 - Absence of national laws, policies and standards on the involvement of smallholder farmers and farmer cooperatives in school feeding programs.
- Limited monitoring and evaluation systems to generate evidence and monitor progress.
- Significant turnover of government officials.
- Lack of nutritionists/dietitians dedicated to the program to help ensure nutritious and balanced meals.



There are things that help governments improve the quality of their school meal programs, including:

- Multi-sectoral collaboration and coordination between ministries of education, agriculture, health, finance and others to ensure a comprehensive approach. This can also include:
 - Establishing an inter-sectoral system for managing the school feeding program.
 - Joint advocacy for school feeding legislation that engages parliament and local councils.
 - Ensuring coordination at the national, provincial & local levels.
- Sustainable government financing through a dedicated school feeding budget. This can also include:
 - Developing a national school feeding sustainability strategy along with a work plan with performance indicators.
 - Additional funding streams dedicated to school feeding that are included in education and agriculture laws.
- Capacity building and technical assistance for actors across the value chain, including smallholder farmers and school feeding staff. This can be done by:
 - Developing public-private partnerships across the value chain.
 - Training local farmers to improve their production capacity.
- Community participation that involves parents, teachers, supervisors, communities, & farmers to guarantee that the program responds to the local needs & traditions.

Government school meal programs already contribute to food systems transformation in the following ways which should continue to be supported and scaled up:

- Connecting schools with nearby farmer organizations through “Farm to School” schemes, supplying local produce to schools.
 - This ensures a steady supply of locally produced food and creates secure markets for farmers.
 - To support this, central governments can provide funds directly to schools to make local purchases as well as provide advance financing to farmers, encouraging them to increase production with guaranteed demand.
 - Another model is to engage women’s farmer organizations which can generate financial opportunities for local women.
 - This model can encourage farmers to adopt more sustainable practices through the tendering process, by championing fresh and organic local produce in schools.
 - Investing in improvements in transporting fresh food is an important consideration.
- Developing school gardens to introduce nutritious foods to children and increase meal diversity.
- Promoting local and traditional culture and cuisine on school meal menus to help students increase their appreciation for nutritious local food.
- Popularizing alternative sources of fuel for clean cooking.

For governments-led school meal programs to further support food systems transformation, the following should be prioritized:

- Increase community-led processing facilities to support local food processing.
- Develop certification guidelines for local products to facilitate local procurement.
- Foster young agriculture entrepreneurs to become healthy food champions.
- Promote underutilized fruits and vegetables on school menus and kitchen gardens.
- Support indigenous and other smallholder farmers to increase local productivity of climate resilient crops.
- Engage nutritionists in the classroom and streamline nutrition education throughout the school meal program.

Governments need the following from partners to implement high-quality school meal programs:

- Greater collaboration with the private sector, especially aggregators to increase local processing.
- Technical assistance for evidence generation and enhancing national research capacity.



Other issues that governments feel need attention in the coming year include:

- Conducting return on investment analysis for their school feeding programs.
- Decreasing turnover of school cooks, by increasing salaries and setting a minimum wage clause for this work.
- Amplify voices on the importance of social inclusion and gender equity in school feeding.

Governments will be sharing the communiqué with the following stakeholders, and will be using it in the following ways:

- It will be shared with:
 - Relevant Ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance, Agriculture, Gender, Social Protection, and Health to support advocacy.
 - Technical and financial partners; local and regional officials and communities; School management committees; and donors.
- It will be used to boost interest and gather joint involvement of key stakeholders in the design and development of the program.
- It will also be used as an advocacy tool to raise awareness on how school meal programs help contribute to child health, and country prosperity.

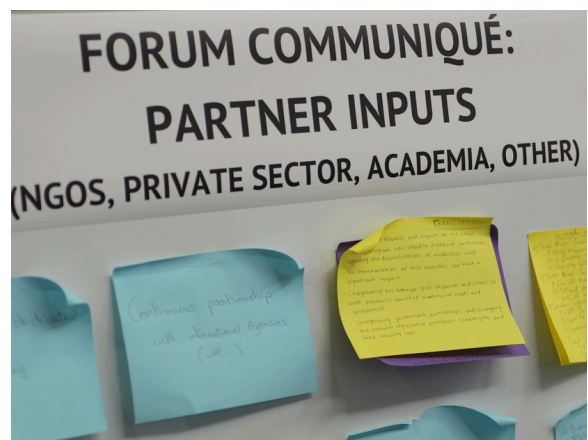
Voices of Partners

(NGOs, Private Sector, Academia, Other)

From 2022 to 2024, most partners noted increased investments in their time and money, especially in the areas of nutrition education, Home-Grown School Feeding, and literacy support.

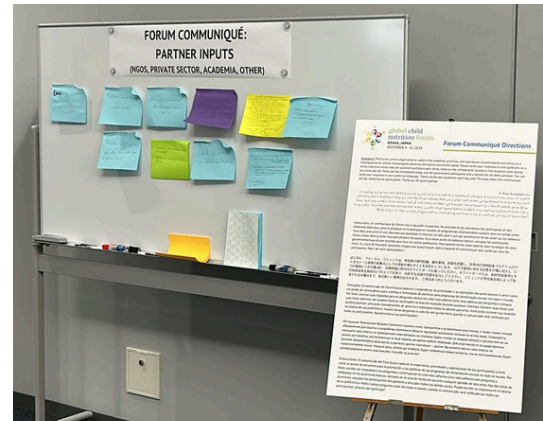
There are things that hinder or prevent partners from supporting the quality of government-owned school meal programs, including:

- Lack of sufficient and predictable budgets.
- Frequent turnover of local staff and officials leading to stagnated program progress.
- Lack of infrastructure to support program implementation (stores, kitchens, running water etc.).
- Climate change and challenges with sustainable growing practices.
- Absence of nutritionists to ensure dietary quality



There are things that help partners support the quality of government-owned school meal programs, including:

- Predictable, multi-year funding.
- Political will shown through financial and budget support, and policy alignment.
- Multi-sectoral and ministerial collaboration.
- More flexibility from both partners and governments in order to address local needs.
- Increase evidence and data generation on the benefit of school meal programs.
- Involvement of the private sector to increase capacity and innovation to address key challenges, such as the impacts of climate change.



Partner support to government-owned school meal programs already contribute to food systems transformation in the following ways which should continue to be supported and scaled up:

- Promotion of highly nutritious food to shape children's dietary behaviors that they are likely to carry over into adulthood by involving dietitians.
- Inclusion of climate-smart, traditional and nutritious foods in school menus in line with the nutritional requirements of schoolchildren.
- Developing school gardens that engage children to mobilize their peers, parents, and communities.
- Training of key stakeholders in food and nutrition education.
- Capacity building for local producers that supply food to the school feeding program.

For partner support to government-owned school meal programs to advance food systems transformation, the following should be prioritized:

- More attention on using school meal programs to drive transformation on farms and the adoption of improved agricultural technologies.
- Where possible and contextually appropriate, adopt more nutritious staple crops that are neglected, indigenous, and biofortified.
- Support governments in food processing, fortification and packaging and provide training and technical assistance.
- Support building the capacity of local aggregation and packaging systems that go beyond just school feeding. This would enable more local purchasing.
- Make nutritious foods exciting through marketing, celebrity chefs, endorsements, artists, etc.
- Increase educational opportunities for children, parents, and stakeholders to better understand the importance of nutritious school meals.
- Continue to strengthen international alliances and coalitions to advocate for increased support from governments.
- Articulating across the political spectrum how school meals is a low-hanging fruit to support food systems transformation.

Other issues that partners feel need attention in the coming year include:

- Capacity building for government stakeholders on monitoring and data management to improve informed decision making processes, including establishing/improving data systems that are centralized.
- Set national targets for school meals (including nutrition goals).
- Improve governance on domestic financing and capture all partner investments to have a more complete picture of funding gaps.
- Addressing unpaid women's labor (cooks and caterers particularly) in low income countries. This has the potential to further increase the vulnerabilities of women and girls. This can be done by:
 - Advocating for policy frameworks sensitive to gender.
 - Systematically tracking and researching unpaid work, costing this labor and contribution to school feeding programs.
 - Engaging Ministries of gender and other stakeholders to ensure gender sensitive school feeding programs.
- Ensure school feeding is reaching all marginalized groups.
- School meal programs to be government-owned should be paid for by governments, and not rely on contributions from vulnerable communities.
- Recognizing that school meals are not only a plate of food. They must consider other complementary interventions to ensure a holistic approach, including addressing water and sanitation, etc.

Partners will be sharing the communiqué with the following stakeholders, using it in the following ways:

- It will be used to guide school meal program surveys/evaluations to understand the relevance, effectiveness, outcomes, impact and recommendations for improvement, scaling up, and future programming and adaptability.
- It will be shared with local communities via workshops, publications and via digital channels to support collaboration.
- It will be shared with other funders and donors and with national governments to advocate for the inclusion of nutrition policies for school feeding.

Conclusion

The 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum recognizes that school meal programs saw an increase in the quality of their programs from 2022 to 2024 and are already contributing to food systems transformation. The Forum also recognizes the need to put in place more sustainable and resilient systems that can supply more – and more nutritious – food for our school children through holistic approaches to transformation and collaboration between all school meals stakeholders. Government representatives and partners will be sharing the communiqué to take further action in all areas as recommended.

Resources & Acknowledgments



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Together, we can ensure that every child has access to nutritious meals, strengthening education, health, and communities worldwide.

Media Links and Resources

- **2024 Forum Communiqué (and translations), Presentations, and Resources:** Access session and workshop presentations and materials to revisit key insights and strategies shared during the Forum by visiting gcnf.org/events/forum
- **Photos from the Forum:** Explore the [shared photo gallery](#) to relive your favorite Forum moments. Please note that photos are for personal and social media use only and may not be published without permission.
- **Forum Wrap-Up Blog:** Read the [official Forum wrap-up blog post](#) highlighting key moments and outcomes.



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