

**DECLARATION OF THE MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE SCHOOL MEALS
COALITION
TENTH REGIONAL FORUM ON SCHOOL MEALS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE
CARIBBEAN 2024**

The Government of Mexico and the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the World Food Program (WFP) jointly organized the Xth Regional School Meals Forum for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), from August 27 to 29 in Mexico City.

The forum was attended by 24 countries, including 18 members of the School Meals Coalition: Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, El Salvador, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Uruguay. Also in attendance were international experts from government agencies and institutes focused on nutrition from different countries in the region; members of international financial institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank (WB), the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI); representatives of multilateral and regional organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as non-governmental organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank (WB), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Coalition on the Indigenous Peoples' Food System, the Community of American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); as well as non-governmental organizations such as The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, Education Cannot Wait, The Food Systems Countdown Initiative, The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and World Vision Latin America and the Caribbean, Global Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition and Global Child Nutrition Foundation.

During the three days of discussion, the forum highlighted the following three priorities for the region in the area of school meals:

1. Promote sound and comprehensive public policies to generate lasting and sustainable school meals programs, highlighting the importance of intersectorality and intersectionality.
2. Strengthen the role of school meals as an instrument for improving the nutrition of children and adolescents, including by creating healthy food environments and safe spaces.

3. Position school meals as a platform that can contribute to climate resilience and support for sustainable food systems in urban and rural areas, based on public procurement from family farmers and smallholders to support local economies.

On the side of this forum, the member countries of the School Meals Coalition held a meeting to discuss the following points:

The conclusions of this forum, as well as the points discussed at the side meeting of the Coalition's member countries during the forum, will be key to developing a coordinated approach to advocating for school meals by the region's States at important international summits during this and next year. These include the Summit of the Future in New York this September, the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro in November, the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) in Spain in July 2025 and the Climate Summits (COP 29 in Baku and COP 30 in Brazil in 2025). It is agreed that these conclusions will be particularly relevance for the second Ministerial Meeting of the School Meals Coalition Executive Group this year and the Second Global Meeting of the School Meals Coalition, to be held in Brazil in September 2025.

In this context, **the member countries** of the School Meals Coalition participating in the Xth Regional School Meals Forum for Latin America and the Caribbean:

- *Recognizing* the Final Declaration of the IX Regional Forum on School Meals in Latin America and the Caribbean in Barranquilla in 2021, the Final Reflections of the High-Level Event "The Power of Multisectoral Approaches to Human Capital Development" in Brasilia in 2023, and the Declaration of the First Global Meeting of the School Meals Coalition in Paris in 2023.
- *Supporting* the conclusions of the Xth Regional Forum on School Meals in Latin America and the Caribbean, presented at the event's closing.
- *Recognizing* the region's commitment to the vision of the School Meals Coalition, which has 19 member states from the region, of which six have developed national commitments, and welcome Uruguay as new members of the Coalition.
- *Highlighting* the relevance of evidence-based public policies to establish school meals as state policy in the region. While currently, 19 out of 33 countries have a school Meals policy or law. At the same time, **they recognize** much remains to be done, especially in terms of strengthening regulatory frameworks for local food purchases that are key to access to healthy diets and promote local economic development.
- *Emphasizing* the importance of national funding for school Meals programs, which in the region represents 99 percent of the investment into these programs on average. **They draw attention to** the disparity between low- and high-income countries regarding the investment per child in school meals.
- *Recognizing* the potential impact of school meals on the nutrition of early childhood and school-age children, as well as the crucial role of the school in creating healthy

food environments and safe spaces for the protection of children. At the same time, **they are aware** that further progress is needed to provide integrated assistance packages in schools, including both school meals and other health and nutrition programs that enable the comprehensive development of children, with only four countries in the region report reporting the provision of an integrated package of at least six interventions at school¹.

- *Highlighting* the transformative potential of school meals programs to achieve sustainable and equitable food systems that make healthy diets for school-age children more readily available, based on family farming and smallholder agriculture, as well the progress made by some countries in the region in supporting the food systems of Indigenous and local communities; as well as Afro-descendant peoples.
- *Recognizing* the adaptive capacity of school meals programs to face climatic, socioeconomic and health crises, as part of national social protection systems; as well as the need to continue strengthening the **preparedness** of the systems through **regulatory, financial and operational mechanisms**.
- *Emphasizing* the **benefits** of school meals programs that make **public purchases from local producers**, such as: fostering local and sustainable economic growth and development (revitalization of the local economy), boosting job creation in the agricultural and food sector, encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation of family farmers and smallholder producers, fostering greater social cohesion, improving food security by reducing dependence on imported foods and contributing to better nutrition for girls and boys, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by reducing transportation distances and adopting more environmentally friendly practices that maintain agricultural diversity; among others.
- *Valuing* the advanced ecosystem of collaboration and the ongoing interest in the region to promote the exchange of ideas, knowledge and lessons learned in school meals and **recognize** the need to increase the coordination of these efforts.
- *Highlighting* the strong network of collaboration and the ongoing efforts in the region to promote the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and best practices in school meals in the region, with the RAES (*Red de Alimentación Escolar Sostenible*)—developed by the Government of Brazil in cooperation with the FAO—standing out as a key initiative.
- *Reaffirming* the value of the School Meals Coalition in Latin America and the Caribbean, co-chaired by the national governments of Finland, France, and Brazil with the Secretariat in charge of the World Food Program, as a platform to strengthen public policies on school meals in the region,
- *Calling* for the coordination/articulation of efforts and optimization of resources within the framework of national commitments adopted and assumed in this area,

¹IBID.

- *Reaffirming* the value of the School Meals Coalition as a platform for supporting countries in improving their national school meals programs, for the exchange of ideas, and for South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and **celebrate** the opportunities for support offered by the Coalition through its initiatives that promote evidence-based, quality public policies. These initiatives include services such as the development of case studies, return on investment studies, analysis of the financing environment, and identification of innovative sources of funding for school meals programs, among others.

They recommend:

1. *To maintain* the high level of political commitment to school meals programs in the region and collectively position school meals as a crucial tool for ensuring the right to adequate food and combating hunger and malnutrition, poverty, and inequality at upcoming high-level summits, such as the Summit of the Future in New York, the COP 29 Climate Summit in Baku, and the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro.
2. *To evaluate* the efficiency and effectiveness of school meals investments to optimize the use of resources, for example, through innovations in implementation, procurement models, and optimization of school menus. The *Sustainable Financing Initiative* and the Coalition's School Health and Nutrition Research Consortium are key partners for member states in this task.
3. *To promote* the generation of national and regional evidence on school meals, based on the unique experiences and challenges of the region, contributing to the research agenda of the School Health and Nutrition Research Consortium, especially on:
 - the quantification of the return on investment in school meals programs, and
 - the potential multiplier effect of school meals,
 - especially of models based on local purchasing, for the well-being of children and local communities,
4. *To encourage* and promote South-South and Triangular Cooperation mechanisms for the exchange of good practices, ideas, knowledge and experiences at the regional level in a coordinated and efficient manner, taking advantage of the diverse ecosystem of regional cooperation in this area, joining efforts with the Coalition to achieve regional, national and local objectives. Moreover, to increase coordination between School Meals Coalition and RAES in order to strengthen the integration of agendas, and promote dialogue between agencies and international organizations to avoid duplication of efforts and mandates. Given the importance of local governments in the design and implementation of these programs, also *explore* ways to support exchanges among them, including between cities.

5. *To undertake* actions to foster healthy food environments in schools and provide an integrated package of health and nutrition interventions that contribute to national efforts to combat the double burden of malnutrition; for example:
 - a. where they do not exist, establish cross-sectoral targets for the provision of additional health and nutrition services in schools as part of the integrated package of care, including nutrition education;
 - b. where they do not exist, develop and implement specific nutritional standards for early childhood and school-aged children, promoting nutritious, safe, fortified, and locally produced meals, and including restrictions on the availability of ultra-processed foods in school settings;
 - c. develop school menus with nutritionists from different government institutions to ensure that they are effective, balanced, and consistent with local preferences, including those of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples, and culturally relevant.
6. *To commit* to the promotion of school meals based on local production and food systems transformation towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and based on national roadmaps and national systems of social protection, within the framework of the 2021 Food Systems Summit. For example:
 - a. where they do not exist, consider targets or commitments for local and family farming procurement and strengthen institutional frameworks to facilitate the implementation of these purchases without compromising safety and adequate nutrition;
 - b. develop strategies to strengthen Indigenous Peoples', local communities' and Afro-descendant Peoples' food systems, taking into account the experiences of some countries in the region that have established policies and strategies that promote inclusive food programs;
 - c. evaluate the multisectoral impact of school meals models based on local purchases on local economies, in terms of job creation, improved menu diversity, among others;
 - d. promote innovative school meals models that use schools as platforms for environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation. For example, with renewable energy, efficient stoves, sustainable menus and strategies for climate change awareness. In addition, prepare operational mechanisms to adapt school meals programs during climate and other crises.
 - e. Consider the policy recommendations of the School Meals and Food Systems white paper published by the School Health and Nutrition Research Consortium.
7. To encourage countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that have not yet joined the School Meals Coalition to consider doing so, and urge member countries **to actively develop and implement** national commitments.

8. To Coalition member states, **to commit** to demonstrating tangible results in line with their national commitments at the Second Stocktaking Progress Report of the Food Systems Summit in 2025 and **to utilize** the Coalition's support mechanisms as well as **contribute** to them.

They conclude:

- Expressing their sincere gratitude to the Government of Mexico, for the hospitality offered to the participants of the Tenth Regional Forum on School Meals and for fostering a space for discussion for the member countries of the School Meals Coalition.
- To continue supporting the initiative to promote regional Exchange and hold the XI Regional School Meals Forum for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2025 or 2026.
- Also thanking the World Food Program for its support in organizing this event, as well as the United Nations Children's Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the Pan American Health Organization. As well as expressing their enthusiasm to attend and contribute to the Second Global Meeting of the School Meals Coalition to be held in Brazil in 2025; the following:

AND DECLARE:

School meals programs are essential to ensure the well-being and comprehensive development of children by contributing to improve their health and teaching - learning capacity, combating malnutrition and food insecurity, especially in the most vulnerable communities, promoting healthy eating habits from an early age, generating long-term positive effects on public health, as well as promoting sustainable development of communities through public procurement from family farmers and smallholder producers. Likewise, South-South and Triangular cooperation are essential tools to make these programs a reality in all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean; therefore, the Member States of the Coalition will continue working within the framework of international cooperation and the points of agreement established in this Declaration.

Mexico City, Mexico, August 29, 2024

**HOJA DE FIRMA / SIGNATURE SHEET / FEUILLE DE SIGNATURE
DECLARACIÓN DE LOS PAÍSES MIEMBROS DE LA COALICIÓN PARA LA
ALIMENTACIÓN ESCOLAR**

X FORO REGIONAL DE ALIMENTACIÓN ESCOLAR PARA AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL
CARIBE 2024

**DECLARATION OF THE MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE SCHOOL MEALS
COALITION TENTH REGIONAL
FORUM ON SCHOOL MEALS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN 2024**

**DÉCLARATION DES PAYS MEMBRES DE LA COALITION POUR
L'ALIMENTATION SCOLAIRE
10e FORUM RÉGIONAL SUR L'ALIMENTATION SCOLAIRE POUR L'AMÉRIQUE
LATINE ET LES CARAÏBES 2024**

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