

2022 first regular session of the Executive Board

Virtual session

High-level event Africa Day of School Feeding

H.E. Shameem Ahsan, President of the Executive Board: Excellencies, Board members and observers. Welcome back to this afternoon session. We are now going to open our high-level segment on African Union commitment to the School Meals Coalition, turning political commitment into concrete action. This high-level segment was scheduled to take place on the occasion of the celebration of the Africa Day of School Feeding, but unfortunately our Board proceedings did not allow for that yesterday.

From the outset let me honour the presence with us today of Her Excellency Angeline Ndayishimiye, First Lady of the Republic of Burundi. Excellency, it is an immense privilege to have you with us today and look forward to hearing your keynote address during our high-level segment. We are all strongly committed to school meals and nutrition in Burundi and to your invaluable support to the activities of WFP in your country.

I am sure that your vision will help build further support to food security on the African continent and beyond. We also have the honour to be joined by several high-level participants who will contribute to this segment this afternoon. His Excellency Haladou Salha, Senior Technical Adviser, African Union Development Agency-NEPAD; Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO; Mr Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, FAO; Mr Andrew Morley, Chief Executive Officer, World Vision International, and Ms Elizabeth Esther, Director of the Education Commission. I welcome you all and thank you for your presence with us today.

I would like to ask our Executive Director to provide us with some introductory remarks. Executive Director, the floor is yours.

D. Beasley, Executive Director: It is great to be here and we are in a virtual session and so everyone is back to their offices. Now, why is that relevant, because since COVID-19 has shut down schools, 370 million children per year have not been getting their school meals and for many of them that is the only meal that they would get per day. You see the impact it has on us. Imagine the impact that it has had on children around the world and the future of those nations when 370 million children are not getting school meals on top of all the children globally that have not been in school because of COVID-19.

Now, that aside, it has been remarkable the success stories and the progress that we have made as this is now our 7th Africa Day of School Feeding and because of our intentional efforts these past seven years, we have seen remarkable success in the number of children now getting school meals from 38 million to over 60 some odd million in Africa alone because African leaders realize that the future and fate of not just the child, but of entire nations is in the hands of having healthy children in schools. And we know what happens when children are healthy, they get a better education and they become better, stronger leaders at home, in their communities, and in their nation.

We clearly get it. We are the world's largest provider of school meals outside of a nation of itself, or a government of itself. That is why the World Food Programme, we have been partnering with many of you that are on our programme and it is such a special day, today. And to have the First Lady of Burundi with us, thank you so much.

As well as so many other special guests. I was Chairman of the Education Committee in the House of Representatives when I was a young person, as a young leader. I saw first-hand what happens when children get a good school meal. I believe in it. I do believe it is the building block economically, morally and any other way that you can think about it. We have done studies, and quite frankly, it is not that complicated. We know Harvard studies for a dollar invested, it is going to be a USD 9 or USD 10 economic return in the community. I can go on and on, because when



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you have school meals the things that ought to go up, go up, and the things that ought to go down, go down.

And you know all of these facts. I am just doing the opening remarks, but I can tell you no one is more excited and has greater confidence in the belief in what we are doing and hopefully as we look to the fall of this year when the Secretary-General pulls together the Transforming Education Summit, we will be providing the building blocks for the power of school meals including home-grown school meals because it is about our children, it is about our community, it is about building a better future.

President: Excellency Angelina Ndayishimiye, I am now very honoured to give you the floor for your keynote address.

Her Excellency Angelina Ndayishimiye, First Lady of the Republic of Burundi (original language French): Your Excellency President of the World Food Programme's Executive Board, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests. All protocols observed, I am very happy and highly honoured that you invited me to take part in this event which is on the side-lines of the work of the World Food Programme's Executive Board. It is of huge importance given the high level of panellists and participants.

I am truly honoured by this invitation which symbolizes for me recognition and appreciation of the work carried out by Burundi supported by all of its partners in development, in particular, of course, the World Food Programme. Indeed, today's celebration is about the success of school feeding programmes on the African continent and how they benefit young people. How they also benefit human capital, and local economies. 55 countries celebrate this day in order to express their commitment to local school feeding programmes which represent an investment in the future of Africa.

As such, over the last decade, Africa has made some quite remarkable progress since the adoption of the Malabo Declaration in 2014. However, the path towards food security for children is still long. Hence, the crucial need to pool our efforts so that all children have enough to eat in quality and quantity terms. It is not acceptable today to see children going to school with empty tummies, when in many parts of the world large amounts of food are simply thrown away.

I congratulate the heads of state, and government of the African Union which established as a joint objective in 2022, the aim of strengthening nutritional resilience and food security on the African continent by strengthening agri-food systems, health systems and social protection systems in order to accelerate the development of human, social and economic capital.

For Burundi, nutrition and food security for children as well as their education are national priorities and we have started to work on those. The vision of the President of the Republic of Burundi, His Excellency Major General Évariste Ndayishimiye, is that there should be food in every mouth and money in every pocket and as such we have committed to work to ensure that there is food in the mouth of every child at school so that they are able to concentrate on their studies, and when they become an adult, they can be highly productive in order to contribute to the country's economic activity and indeed to have adequate resources in their pockets.

With this in mind, the Government has adopted measures towards universal access to education by the adoption of a free education policy for all children in the basic school cycle from the 1st to the 9th year on the one hand. And the Government of Burundi also supported by WFP and its partners is implementing the indigenous school feeding programme which is based on the consumption of food that is locally produced and purchased. The success of school feeding and therefore of nutrition and food security for millions of children on the African continent has also been achieved thanks to increased funding from national budgets, 80 percent of the funding comes from the African countries themselves.



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Expanding local school feeding programmes should increasingly become a priority for the African Union and its member countries. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) as well as the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme and the 2014 Malabo Declaration all mention school feeding at home as an intervention that should be further intensified in order to achieve the objectives linked to access to education and schooling results as well as promoting agricultural and rural development.

However, despite the impressive progress which has been made in Africa and the political commitment, we need specific support in order to achieve the minimum levels of coverage. Even pre-pandemic, 60 million children living in extreme poverty had no access to meals at school. The additional negative effects of seeing schools closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic could further drive up this number.

To bridge this gap, Africa needs the support of its partners. The aim is to continue to implement national programmes which will prove sustainable and autonomous. I urge all of you, my colleagues from the member countries of the African Union to act and to make school feeding a national priority. By way of example, in Burundi, the programme meant that we were able to reduce the school drop-out rate from 11 percent to 7 percent and to increase the rate of children in school from 5 percent to 14 percent. It also means that farmers are able to access new markets for their products and it allows our communities to prosper.

These actions have a powerful and lasting impact that can help communities to get back on their feet, to reduce inequality and to break inter-generational cycles of hunger and poverty. Thanks to the indigenous school feeding programme, WFP is currently supporting the Government in Burundi in providing school meals to about 670,000 children in over 849 schools which are in 7 of the 18 provinces in Burundi. However, there are still 2,756,241 children who do not have access to meals at school.

Burundi's accession to the global School Meals Coalition, the organization in Burundi of the forum of women leaders on nutrition with the participation of Her Excellency the First Lady of the Niger and high-level delegations from several other African countries bear eloquent witness to the commitment of our country to play a leading role in shaping the future of our children by enhancing South-South exchange, by creating and maintaining a sustainable institutional, political and financial environment which will foster nutrition and food security among children in Africa.

Over 26 African countries as well as the African Union and AUDA-NEPAD have already signed up to the coalition and I would urge the other countries and partners present here today to join us in our efforts and to sign up. I would like to wish all of you success in this event and ongoing commitment in order to push this agenda forward. It is only by working together that we can ensure that an entire generation of children is not left aside.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, all protocols observed, I cannot conclude without thanking the organizers of today's event. I hope you will have a highly fruitful exchange and that your resolutions will further inspire our action towards a world in which every child wherever they are, has access to a healthy meal every day at school by 2030 because we do not have the right and we cannot afford to hand on hunger and malnutrition to future generations.

President: This has been a very powerful message addressed to the international community, and it is remarkable to see such an amazing level of commitment towards school feeding at the highest level in your country. Colleagues, members of the Board, I will now pass over the floor to Ms Valerie Guarnieri, who will moderate our round table with our high-level participants.

Ms V. Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department: No child should go to school hungry. All children should benefit from a nutritious



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meal at school and we heard this from the First Lady of Burundi, thank you so much Madame Ndayishimiye for your very inspiring words.

I am so pleased to join the celebration and moderate an exciting panel of partners and friends to highlight the progress made in Africa and discuss the support that partners can provide and wish to provide to help children and communities thrive and strengthen national programmes.

And thank you so much First Lady for joining us today and I congratulate Burundi for the strong commitment you have demonstrated towards ensuring that children, all children, receive a healthy and nutritious meal in school.

As Executive Director Beasley highlighted, Africa has been leading the way with 51 African countries celebrating this Africa Day of School Feeding and voicing their commitment to home-grown school meals programmes as an investment in Africa's future. And in less than 10 years, Africa has doubled the number of children receiving school meals from 38 to 65 million and now 27 African nations have signed up to the School Meals Coalition and are using that opportunity that came out of the food systems summit to redouble their commitment and their support.

And Africa is putting its money where its mouth is, domestic budget allocations for school meals. We heard this from the First Lady and we know that President Talon of Benin has committed USD 270 million over the next five years to scale up the national school meals programme. President Kagame of Rwanda is scaling-up national school meals from 640,000 children today to 3.3 million children in just two years and President Macky Sall, newly appointed President of the African Union, has increased his national budget for school feeding in 2022.

Just a few weeks ago during the African Union and European Union summit, I moderated another exciting panel about the importance of school meals programmes to build human capital and we had panellists from DRC and Senegal who made strong and ambitious remarks and commitments and the representative of Senegal asked how can we ask learners to perform at school if they go to school on an empty stomach?

Well, we cannot, like the First Lady said, which is why Senegal's President instructed his Finance Minister to allocate USD 2.5 million to school feeding in 2022 and the DRC, which is working with WFP to establish a national programme, Vice-Minister joined that session and said we strongly believe that by expanding school meals programmes, we can directly support human capital development which will result in our country's economic growth, inclusive social development and prosperity.

Again, echoing the messages that the First Lady shared with us today and these statements are testimony to the leadership, commitment and drive that African nations have in ensuring that children receive a nutritious meal in school. Today we will hear from leading partners from the African Union Development Agency. We will hear from United Nations agencies and international NGOs that have shown equal resolve and commitment to making school meals a priority and the actions that they are taking to operationalize that on the ground. We heard who is coming, let me take them up one by one. We will start first with His Excellency Haladou Salha, Senior African Union and NEPAD technical adviser to the group of Rome-based African ambassadors and acting as the African Union and NEPAD senior liaison officer to the Rome-based United Nations agencies. Haladou it is nice to see you. African countries have shown progress in strengthening and scaling up school meal programmes across the continent and this has been a sustained commitment over the past decade. A commitment I know that you have been part and parcel of, but why is school feeding such a priority for the continent and for so many governments and what is your vision for the future?

H.E. Haladou Salha, Senior Technical Adviser, African Union Development Agency-NEPAD:

First, I would like to apologize on behalf of His Excellency Dr Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, the Chief Executive Officer of NEPAD for not being able to be with you this afternoon due to previous



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commitments and to express our warm thanks to WFP for once again offering us this wonderful opportunity of celebrating the Africa Day of School Feeding here in Rome, Italy under the margins of the first regular session of its Board.

As you may know, the 35th session of the African Union Summit and as you mention has just ended on 6 February 2022, was under the following theme for the year 2022: Strengthening resilience in nutrition and food security on the African continent, which of course should be understood and translated as strengthening agri-food systems, health and social protection assistance for the acceleration of human, social and economic capital development.

Yes indeed, school feeding programmes have been around since the 1960s in many African countries and based on the studies commissioned by NEPAD and AUC. These studies were carried out with effective technical support in particular from WFP and other partners including the cause of hunger study and the political review of the school feeding studies in Africa. These studies confirmed the benefit of school feeding and this benefit is enormous. It has all been said by Mr Beasley so nicely, improving children's nutrition, keeping them at school in particular girls, learning effectively, fighting short-term hunger and it is a type of special protection of course.

This is why in July 2003, upon request and under the leadership of NEPAD, WFP together with the millennium hunger task force and in collaboration with UNICEF and FAO finalized the NEPAD home-grown school feeding concept linking school feeding directly with agricultural development. It is designed to stimulate local production through the purchase of locally produced and processed food for schools. Local smallholder farmers will be given the opportunity under the initial assistance to provide schools with the necessary food products wherever possible.

Because of the sound political commitment of African countries to school feeding, this concept of school feeding programme has been embedded into the Africa common position paper which was submitted by our leaders to the September 2021 United Nations food systems summit, and it is fortunately highlighted as an African particularity under the established School Meals Coalition.

I wish to inform you that yesterday 1 March 2022, NEPAD has seized the opportunity of the 7th Africa Day of School Feeding to launch the technical guidelines that would help countries to better design and articulate the home-grown school feeding project. In terms of vision for the future, I would say the vision of the AU which is of course the assembly of African state members. I would instead talk about key principles and requirements for a successful implementation of sustainable home-grown school feeding programmes.

Home-grown school feeding programmes are designed to stimulate local production by purchasing the food required from local smallholder farmers and the processes they create are: a stable demand for quality and safe food; stimulate the local production; support the development of local skills; and combat malnutrition by providing initial assistance to local smallholder farmers to develop their capacity for providing a reliable food supply. Home-grown school feeding programmes can also expand opportunities for smallholder farmers to gain access to markets and contribute to rural transformation. Therefore it should be country-led, meaning we should have the political will of the government. Ownership supported by political and sustainable financial commitments.

This financial commitment should be institutionalized through national legislation including through departments of the country. Then another principle is about mutual accountability of all stakeholders including smallholder farmers who are the children's parents, domestic private sector, development and financial partners. This may require of course good governance and a



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multi-partner coordination mechanism combined with a type of key review mechanism to constantly monitor and evaluate mutual commitments.

These are the key principles and of course the requirements that could safeguard a sustainable home-grown school feeding programme in each of the countries which will volunteer to implement such concept.

Ms V. Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development

Department: Thank you so much Ambassador Salah, my friend Haladou, for really showing that African Union and NEPAD's commitment and leadership which has been so impressive in scaling up school health and nutrition across Africa, but with that strong link to local agriculture.

And as you highlighted, it all comes together at the community level with the children and their parents who are the smallholders supplying the school. It is a beautiful cycle there. We are going to move now to Ms Stefania Giannini, the Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO. Now, we heard and we know that schoolchildren have been among those most affected during the pandemic in terms of lost education opportunities, but also because their general well-being has been threatened and UNESCO is leading this global push to put education at the top of this agenda.

This year we have the Transforming Education Summit which will be an opportunity to do just that.

Stefania, given the priority that countries are giving to school health and nutrition, how is the education sector ensuring that this issue is being tackled with concrete actions and partnerships and how can we strengthen the collaboration with other sectors like health and food systems, and social protection for the benefit of children and their well-being?

Ms S. Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO: Thank you very much Valerie for having me on this panel on this very, very important and quite timely discussion on the role of health and nutrition for better learning and quality education. Let me say first of all, that UNESCO is very proud to have joined the School Meals Coalition. A very important initiative from the very beginning together with other United Nations agencies and, as the Executive Director has just mentioned and thank you for his strong leadership on that, so much has been achieved in a year. To us at UNESCO what is at stake now is achieving inclusive quality education for all.

I mean SDG 4, the old package and this is not only the core of the SDG agenda, it is a kind of moral imperative, I would say. We know the importance of good nutrition and health to ensure all boys and girls have access to and can take full advantage of learning opportunities is not a new topic so to say.

There is a lot of evidence on the positive impacts of school health and nutrition programmes on learning outcomes and inclusive education and learning. However, and this is the new dimension, the COVID-19 pandemic, with the most serious disruption that the education sector has known in history has strongly reminded us of the linkages between learners' health, nutrition and education.

Where we can and we must build on, and where also the School Meals Coalition counts, we know the terrible effects of school closures which have shown that schools are not simply essential and crucial and simply essential places of learning, but they also deliver key services, like school feeding which are central to learners' health, sense of belonging and crucially well-being.

How can we now strengthen this coalition, how can we build on that in the coming months? First of all, I would say the year 2022 will be instrumental to shape the future of education, broadly speaking. As you may know, the United Nations Secretary-General announced his intention to convene a Transforming Education Summit in September this year as part of Our Common Agenda.



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As the world comes out from the COVID-19 crisis we are at the beginning of the end. The summit will provide a unique opportunity to mobilize greater political ambition, commitment and action to reverse the slide on SDG 4, to reimagine education to accelerate progress on education on the 2030 Agenda more broadly. And it also provides a unique opportunity to put health and well-being, including school nutrition and school meals as core elements of a renewed vision for the education we need and must have.

I am pleased to share that learners' health and well-being, including school health and nutrition, are already well-positioned in the initial preparatory documents of the summit and this is a very good starting point. It has been proposed that one of the action tracks be on inclusive safe and healthy schools and this means addressing school health and nutrition together with equity and inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalized learners. This is not by chance. It reflects how important these issues are for member states.

And member states ownership and commitment to that are very much one of the goals of the summit. In addition, a pre-summit will be organized in Paris in June and will be a key window to further emphasize the importance of investing in sound school health and nutrition programmes. Let me invite all of you to work together around this important event and let me stress Valerie, the great cooperation we already have in preparation for this event and the follow-up of this event this year. I see national level consultations as a key part of the process and we are looking forward to engaging with partners of the School Meals Coalition in the country dialogues.

Beyond the summit, UNESCO is also committed to working with all of you, all the partners at country level to restore access to school health and nutrition programmes including school meals. It is not simply crucial to have these as one of the priorities in the education agenda, but also to be sure that things happen on the ground. We have data evidence which are key to informing advocacy and sound policies.

This is a very important part of the job we are doing together and it is very important that a renewed cooperation mechanism for education can bring school health and nutrition to the very core of the common action plan. We are very happy and ready to make this initiative very much outcomes-oriented, results-oriented. We just heard from the First Lady of Burundi and AU-NEPAD how things are moving on the ground in African countries and of course, as you know, for us at UNESCO, Africa is a global priority so we will focus very much on that region.

Ms V. Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department: It was great to see you yesterday in person. We are sorry we missed having you here with us in Rome with the delay in the event, but really we see the School Meals Coalition as bringing some good wind behind the sails of your Transforming Education Summit and look forward to close collaboration there.

Of course, as you highlighted most importantly at the country level where nation and national leadership is so key. Next up we have Máximo Torero Cullen, a stranger to the group here in Rome, a Chief Economist of FAO. A champion of school meals and the School Meals Coalition. FAO joined the coalition and has been right alongside WFP, UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO in supporting it. FAO is leading on several strands of work that are really important for the quality and sustainability of the school meals programmes on the ground.

Máximo can you share with us how FAO is supporting the goals of the coalition and maybe give us some examples of how these activities are being implemented in Africa?

M. Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great pleasure to join the celebration of the Africa Day of School Feeding and I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of FAO.



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First, I would like to confirm that FAO is fully committed to supporting countries through the School Meals Coalition.

The coalition comes at a very critical time when action for agri-food systems transformation is more necessary than ever. And the role that schools play in transformation is high under the global political agenda. In 2019, FAO adopted a corporate framework for holistic action on school food and nutrition as a direct response to the call for better nutrition and agri-food systems transformation in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025.

FAO has been supporting countries in the development and implementation of policies, legislation which is extremely important and programmes to improve the school food environments. These efforts focus on ensuring consistency between healthy and culturally appropriate foods at school and food and nutrition education to improve dietary behaviours.

FAO also works with local smallholder producers, family farmers and wider institutional structures so that the value chains for delivering food to schools are shorter, more inclusive, and more sustainable. As part of FAO's normative work, the organization has developed a global action plan for school food and nutrition for the next five years. It seeks to consolidate and guide FAO's logistic efforts setting out priority and concrete outputs to be achieved by 2026.

The plan establishes the way in which the organization will directly support the coalition. Specifically, we are going to work on three core areas. First, a concrete indicator to track FAO support to the School Meals Coalition. We have to be held accountable for what we do in the School Meals Coalition. Second, a global methodology as part of a joint FAO/WFP project, a methodology to be used by countries to set nutritional standards for their school meals programmes is being developed.

In Africa, the methodology will be piloted in Ghana, and in Asia in Cambodia. The methodology will be promoted in various regions together with capacity development so that countries can adapt it to their local context. And third, on an online platform. As part of the project, an online platform is being developed to compile and share qualitative information on the development, implementation and evaluation processes of nutritional standards and food education across countries.

This will allow the exchange of best practices and to identify concrete challenges and obstacles toward multi-agency support in these areas. This element of the platform is essential because sometimes we focus too much on the impact and not on the process to achieve that impact and documenting that process is something central so that other countries can learn from it, can learn from their mistakes, can learn from what works, and they can implement it in their country adapting it to their reality and being able to properly scale up their school meals programmes.

Furthermore, FAO will directly support a number of initiatives under the coalition. Most specifically the Research Consortium led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Peer-to-Peer Initiative led by Germany. We are currently discussing with Germany how the online platform I have just mentioned, could be of benefit to the Peer-to-Peer Initiative.

For the Research Consortium, the main aim is to advance the global evidence base on multi-sector returns on investments and programmatic characteristics of effective holistic and school meals programmes. In these areas of collaboration, we will focus on creating and translating evidence on economic returns of local agricultural market development as part of home-grown school feeding programmes, so maybe this evidence is still there, but we need to keep working on bringing as much as possible evidence. Secondly, multiple impacts from implementing sustainable and inclusive procurement mechanisms in the school meals programmes.

As we know, the impacts are not only direct impacts, but also there are indirect impacts that we will need to take into account. Third, nutrition impacts of implementing food systems based on



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nutritional standards for school feeding. And fourth, multiple outcomes, especially behavioural outcomes and process evaluation of implementing a holistic food and nutrition education across the school systems. It is important to understand that by working with the schools and with the kids in the schools, we are not only touching the individuals, the kids who are benefiting their nutrition and their well-being for the future, but we can also be affecting their behaviour and how they will influence their parents and their families back at home. That is what we call our inter-generational mobility. That change in behaviour can help enormously also in the aim that we all have a way in which everybody can have access to healthy diets by changing the way they eat and what they eat. Partnerships between FAO and the key United Nations agencies have also been consolidated for greater impact.

For example, FAO and UNICEF are working together to strengthen governing capacity in food and nutrition education. While FAO and WFP's Centre of Excellence in Brazil are collaborating to strengthen the connection between the smallholder farmers and the school meals programmes and markets. The School Meals Coalition will be the main platform on which to share lessons learned from these efforts.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that FAO stands ready to partner with key organizations to continue supporting the stakeholders across the African continent and allow members to achieve their commitments to the coalition.

Ms V. Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development

Department: Thank you so much Máximo and this effort that you are bringing to the table with all of the rigour and skills that help build the evidence on both the what and the how of this work together of the School Meals Coalition is so important because we need to have that evidence base and be able to communicate it so that nations make the investments they need to be making and we know that starts with a strong and clear evidence base of the multifaceted results that come from this.

We are really excited about your engagement and your partnership, and that brings me to the last speaker.

I would like to turn to Andrew Morley, Chief Executive Officer, World Vision. World Vision is one of WFP's largest partners. We work with World Vision more than any other single organization on the ground. Maybe no surprise that World Vision was one of the first partners to join the School Meals Coalition already so active with us in school meals programmes around the world.

Andrew how can the work of international NGOs contribute to the goals of the School Meals Coalition and how can we best use the coalition's network including this NGO network to scale up that support to African countries?

A. Morley, Chief Executive Officer, World Vision International: It is a privilege to be here among such distinguished guests and thank you so much for your question. I join you today having just returned from the Ukrainian border where I saw the importance of feeding hungry, scared children first-hand. But first I want to step back and acknowledge what most of us already know, that is the life-saving importance of school meals and let us celebrate the Africa Day of School Feeding.

Let us celebrate that over the last 10 years, we have seen an incredible rise in African school meals served from 38 million to 65 million school meals served every day. And not only do school meals provide much-needed nutrition, but they also improve health and protect children. School meals help to ensure that girls particularly, but also boys, are in the classroom learning for their futures. The alternative is that they are forced into child labour or child marriage and as David shared, let us also remember the importance of home-grown school meals. Not just for the children, but their families and their livelihoods too. For some, these meals are the very reason they go to school as they simply will not get a decent meal elsewhere. In terms of achieving the goals of the



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coalition, it is something we are deeply committed to and answering your question about NGOs and how we contribute.

Well, this is led by governments, but in your context, reflecting the particular needs of children in your communities. Governments shape the policy, we listen, we advise when asked and we stand ready to implement programmes. And localization is crucial to us at World Vision and indeed, 99.5 percent of our staff come from the very communities they serve. That is 37,000 staff across 100 countries. And they know the children we are supporting and empowering directly.

I was speaking just this week with our global leader for school meals, Daniel Wanganga, and Daniel himself had this life transformational event which was a school meal and Daniel grew up in Africa, in rural Kenya, and he was sharing with me the knowledge that he is sharing with others from two decades of working on our school meals programme.

I caught up with him just a couple of days ago, and I asked him a question that I thought might be interesting to this group and I wanted to share his response with you all.

[Screening of video]

Daniel's life could be very different without school meals and I am so grateful that now he is bringing that passion and expertise to World Vision. Last year alone we supplied school meals to over two-thirds of a million children and 70 percent of our school meals programming is within the African continent. We operate in countries like South Sudan, Central African Republic, Mozambique, Burundi, the Sudan, DRC, Rwanda and many others which brings me to another story that I want to share with you. A story of a child whose life has been transformed by school meals. This is human capital in action.

This story is from Burundi where we were honoured to host Your Excellency the First Lady of Burundi last year to see our work. And this story is about 16-year-old Ange who lives in Muyinga province in the north. Now like many children, Ange missed a whole school year because she kept getting sick caused by malnutrition linked to COVID-19. World Vision in partnership with the Government of Burundi and the World Food Programme introduced meals at her school and Ange told me, "Once I resumed my schooling I could now stay in school with the hot meals I have each day." And Ange is now healthy and well-nourished. Like so many children, Ange also is very ambitious.

She wants to learn, she wants to be a President, Prime Minister, a real change agent in her country and she now has a bright future ahead of her, able to reach her God-given potential and all it took was a school meal and a partnership with the World Food Programme, World Vision, an NGO and the local government. And the results are spectacular.

At this one school, 435 children, 60 used to drop out each year and now in the last year, only 3 dropped out. And in Ange's class, no one dropped out because they have school meals. It is a story repeated everywhere. Across the Muyinga province canteens are now set up in 90 schools, reaching 50,000 pupils with hot meals. To close, school meals do not just bring health, they bring education, they bring hope, they bring protection, and they bring life itself.

And it is the children like Ange who were among the first partners to join the School Meals Coalition, World Vision. And World Vision and other NGOs continue to stand alongside you all here today to partner with you, to support you, and to let our children reach their God-given potential.

And as we heard from the First Lady of Burundi, we need to work together across Africa to pass on hunger and malnutrition, not to future generations. Let us not rest until every child in Africa is served a healthy home-grown school meal every single day. You have my commitment and on behalf of World Vision International and our commitment to our 37,000 staff across 100 countries, we stand here to support you.



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Ms V. Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department: Thank you so much, Andrew for really showing the heart of our programme. Those children who we are all working together to assist, to support, to empower, to give that stepping stool for a better future. And you brought that home. And thank you to all of the panellists for your statements. Stefania, Máximo, Haladou, as well as Andrew. Your statements have really helped amplify this event, but even more importantly your actions and your strong drive to support governments and children in Africa are so inspiring for us all. No child should go to school hungry, and all children should benefit from a nutritious meal in school.

President: Thank you to all participants for their interventions and to Ms Guarnieri for moderating the round table. Board members, I would now like to open the floor for the interventions from the lists. As agreed at the last Bureau meeting, each list will have the opportunity to take the floor for three minutes. I can see Morocco from List A.

The representative of Morocco (original language French): Your Excellency, Madame Angeline Ndayishimiye, Mr President, Executive Director, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests. I am taking the floor now on behalf of List A and first of all, I would like to welcome Her Excellency, the First Lady of Burundi, and address our warmest greetings to all other distinguished participants.

As the godmother of the national school meals programme in your country, you have enhanced its visibility and allowed thousands of children to have access to schools, to conclude their schooling and to be successful.

Thanks to your commitment, your steady commitment, this programme has contributed to leading different partners to commit themselves more to supporting the nutritional component of the national school meals programme to improve health, nutrition of schoolchildren, and better school results, and to stimulate the economy, strengthening local food systems, offering local farmers an outlet for their products. Thank you First Lady for your efforts of having honoured and graced this day.

Ladies and gentlemen, the school feeding programmes are an investment in future generations, allowing each child to have access to education and healthy nutrition. These programmes not only improve the nutrition and health of the children but are also a strong encouragement to their parents to send them to school and to make sure that they have good educational outcomes. Recognizing their vital importance the Africa Day of School Feeding was established as a major contribution to achieving the African Union Agenda 2063, the underpinning vision of which is a prosperous African continent with well-educated citizens, with no child missing out on school because of poverty.

Today the data suggests that globally in a differentiated way our programmes have increased the rates of children enrolled in school. They have increased school attendance and decreased drop-out rates and offered a framework for coordinated action to promote food security and finally they have also made it possible to generate income for farmers by making use of local production. Therefore, school feeding programmes have undoubtedly contributed to changing the lives of our communities and the lives of thousands of young people in Africa.

Our continent is the youngest in the world and it offers therefore formidable promises. However, achieving this potential depends on investments that we will be making today in the generations of tomorrow. And school feeding programmes provide an essential safety net and a vital investment in our future.

Ladies and gentlemen, just before the outbreak of COVID-19 school feeding programmes were nourishing close to 400 million children, one out of every two in primary school. However,



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this effort has been slowed down and many children have missed out on school and now it must be a priority for us to ensure that the school meals programmes start again.

The School Meals Coalition is a multi-sectorial tool to support children and achieve the SDGs. And I cannot conclude without paying tribute to WFP which is supporting our programmes in Africa and partnering with nearly 40 governments providing technical and operational support to government projects and adapting them to the specific needs of each country. Thank you for your partnership.

Thank you for your strong support and I would like to conclude with these words. Making my very best wishes that our discussion may be a sound contribution to consolidate our coalition. And finally, I would like to once again thank the First Lady of Burundi for having honoured us with her presence.

President: Now the floor goes to the United States of America.

The representative of the United States of America: List D welcomes the special session on the African Union commitment to the School Meals Coalition in commemorating the Africa Day of School Feeding. We thank the First Lady of Burundi for her participation. We would like to thank Executive Director Beasley alongside all the other speakers at this special session. We take note of the objectives of this session and make note of the significant political commitment of African countries in prioritizing school meal programmes. Especially with so many African countries demonstrating their commitment through joining the School Meals Coalition which has been one of the key results of the United Nations food systems summit last year.

Launched by leaders from all over the world on 16 November 2021, the coalition benefits from strong, high-level political momentum with 60 other Member States that are taking concrete action towards a common objective to provide every child with access to a healthy and nutritious meal every day by 2030.

Since the Africa Day of School Feeding began in 2016 we are encouraged by the examples of political will translating into concrete actions with the creation and adoption of national school feeding policies, laws to national budget line items dedicated to providing nutritious school meals. We recognize the need for local and national efforts in school feeding to ensure long-term sustainability. We recognize how important integrating school meals in nutrition programmes is for human capital development in order to support children in developing their full potential in life and to leave no one behind.

A core need to improve school attendance, better educational outcomes especially for girls and for boosting beneficiaries long-term earning capacity. At scale, strong sustainable school meal programmes including the ongoing school feeding model can alleviate poverty, support economic growth and foster gender equality. Where home-grown school feeding programmes are an option the local sourcing of food can be an important stimulus for agricultural development and increased incomes in the agriculture sector supporting local markets, farmers and food systems.

We appreciate and encourage the efforts of WFP, FAO and other partners to build connections between these different sectors. While most global child nutrition efforts focus on the first 1,000 days of life, school meal programmes promote improved nutrition during middle school, real childhood and adolescence, therefore, providing a much-needed opportunity to catch up on growth, to support not just physical development but also a higher level of cognitive, emotional and social skills development as children continue to grow. In this regard, we welcome school meal programmes and their multisectoral benefits in part of the discussion during the Transforming Education Summit that will be convened by the United Nations Secretary-General in September 2022.



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Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the education and well-being of children in profound ways. Due to school closures, millions of children were left out without access to one meal a day that they can rely on. Further, we recognize the challenges of advocating school meal budgets and financial contributions to be prioritized when national budgets are stretched.

In the face of these challenges, we are supportive of the work being done within countries to build sustainable national school meal programmes that reach the most vulnerable. We encourage eligible countries to include school meal programmes as a key reform for the transformation of education systems in their grant allocations for the Global Partnership for Education.

To conclude, List D thanks, welcomes and supports this special session, highly values the importance of nutritious school meals and the African Union's commitment to the School Meals Coalition. The School Meals Coalition is a welcome mechanism to bring together countries and partners to restore, strengthen and scale up school meal programmes around the world.

President: Now on behalf of List C, Argentina.

The representative of Argentina (original language Spanish): It is a great pleasure to take part in this high-level segment as convener for List C. As I mentioned in my opening statement, I would like to thank Philip Ward and the outgoing Bureau for having organized this event and in particular, I would like to thank the First Lady of Burundi, Her Excellency Angeline Ndayishimiye.

During my Chairmanship of the Rome Chapter of the G77 plus China, I had the possibility of being a privileged witness of the incredible efforts that were made day after day by my brothers and sisters of the African regional group in promoting social, economic and environmental development in their countries. Africa has a shared common vision on the urgent need to create the necessary conditions so as to ensure that new generations across the continent can overcome the challenge and the scourge of food insecurity and malnutrition.

My sisters and brothers are very much aware that in order to achieve this objective it is fundamental that capacity building takes place and that agro-production fabrics are strengthened in order to create jobs, to transfer technology, to have fair financing and to provide suitable stimulation so as to ensure that young people, girls and boys in Africa, can not only receive healthy food from an early age but they can also look forward to an auspicious future with concrete possibilities for progress.

Immediate action and the right solutions are indeed necessary to overcome emergencies, but they are not enough to attack the root causes of hunger. Consolidating solid foundations for a future free from injustices is necessary, making concrete the right to food is essential and providing the concrete possibilities of going to bed without suffering hunger is essential, and this initiative is a real opportunity to do this.

In this framework, the School Meals Coalition led by the World Food Programme and Carmen Burbano and her team is carrying out incredible work. The right adequate food at the right age, at young ages, is the cornerstone for development and is our obligation. Furthermore, we have to look at synergies and lessons that we can learn.

For example, Brazil a pioneer country in developing school feeding programmes and a firm cooperating actor with Africa, developed in Brasilia in 2011 the Centre for Excellence Against Hunger, led by WFP which looks at lessons learned and experiences on school feeding. And the successful experience of Brazil has made it possible to create a Centre for Excellence for central and western Africa in 2019. Let us learn from these successes and let us replicate the positive strategies.

I would like to insist that school feeding is a cross-cutting factor. It allows children to be in the right condition to learn. It helps to overcome the gender gap. It educates on the importance of having



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healthy diets. It reawakens the playful curiosity that children have about how food is produced. And it allows children to be able to play and to learn without worrying about the problems of adults.

Despite being critical to a certain degree on the dynamic of the food systems summit I must nevertheless recognize the fact that the school feeding programme is a point that brings many together. Countless countries in Africa and other regions have raised their voices to support this initiative and often it has been said that national programmes need to be strengthened.

There has been a great deal of agreement on this, and joint voices have been raised in order to strengthen school feeding. WFP is without any doubt in a unique situation to revitalize and strengthen school feeding. It has the right experience and long-term vision, and it knows first-hand the specific country needs that exist. I believe that this day of school feeding must act as an axis for consolidating the synergies of WFP with Africa and in this way advance towards our objective of changing lives without the need of simply focusing on saving lives.

President, if we are able to change the lives of children we will not only meet our moral obligations, but we will also be able to guarantee that we achieve the 2030 Agenda goals which ultimately is our road map, our shared road map which through its SDGs sets the objectives that we have to reach in order to guarantee inclusive and sustainable futures for all.

Once again, I would like to congratulate all of those taking part and I would like to thank WFP for its efforts in strengthening the school feeding in synergy with successful examples such as those that I mentioned in Brazil. And I am convinced that through the South-South and triangular cooperation focus my region, Africa and others can learn a lot from each other and they can cooperate mutually. And this will help us to reach the virtuous aims of changing lives of children, of boys and girls in Africa.

President: Next Poland.

The representative of Poland: Mr President, I am delivering this statement in my capacity, as the Convener of List E, however, I am certain that most of the List E members can align themselves with this statement.

First of all, let me thank you for organizing this event. Right now, more than ever, it is important that we discuss how to effectively turn political commitments into concrete actions as regards the sustainable school meals programmes in Africa, but also in other regions and countries.

We are all aware that school meals programmes do more than just provide food to nourish children. But at the same time, support development of the local agriculture systems and markets and vitally contribute to improving health, nutrition and education of the local communities and thus making them more resilient.

How important these programmes are, has been shown during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis where almost all countries closed their schools, leaving hundreds of millions of schoolchildren without access to the one meal a day they could rely on. In combination with conflicts and climate change challenges are just mounting.

Therefore, I very much welcome in this regard that the School Meals Coalition was launched during the food systems summit last year. This coalition should and I am positive that it will come up with necessary actions to establish, improve and scale up food and education systems and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

As we know, there are already a large number of countries and organizations which joined the coalition, and I am confident that others will do so. Poland is a proud member of the coalition and is ready to support its work at its best.



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We welcome that WFP has been supporting the School Meals Coalition and serving as a coordinating body from the start. WFP has a deep, long-term and a first-hand experience with these kinds of programmes and I believe that it will immensely contribute to achieving its goals. Lastly, I strongly commend that many African countries have already taken necessary actions to establish and support school meals programmes and have incorporated them in their national strategies. I believe in this regard that the School Meals Coalition will substantially contribute to further strengthening their actions.

President: Thank you for this contribution to this high-level segment. I would now like to offer the floor back to our participants in case they would like to react to the statements made by the lists. With your permission I would now like to hand the floor over to Ms Liesbet Steer, Director of the Education Commission for some concluding remarks on our high-level segment.

Ms L. Steer, Director of the Education Commission: Thank you, Mr President, and let me extend also my sincere thanks to Mr David Beasley, Her Excellency Angeline Ndayishimiye, with Valerie Guarnieri and her wonderful team led by Carmen Burbano, as well as every esteemed colleague here today who has contributed to this valuable discussion.

The message today is crystal clear, if we are to be the first generation in history to end extreme poverty and equip every child and young person with the skills they need we must deliver on one of the most important safety nets for children and that is healthy meals every day in schools.

Today with the Education Commission Chair and the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown, I want to applaud everyone for their efforts to advance this dream that we share that instead of developing only some of the potential of some of the children in some countries we nurture, and we feed the potential of all children in all countries. One other message is really clear today that we are all facing extremely difficult choices in terms of what to prioritize. School meals must be one. The conversations we are having here are critical to turning political commitment into action. As the global community faces one crisis after another there has not been a better time than now to promote and invest in programmes that we know are effective and could make a real difference. The strong political commitment and progress have already been demonstrated in African countries and that is what we are celebrating here.

As mentioned by the First Lady of Burundi and the African Union Development Agency, over the past eight years African governments have already increased the coverage of school meals by 70 percent going from less than 40 million to over 65 million children covered. Those programmes were nearly all nationally-owned and with more than 90 percent paid for by the countries themselves.

Countries have been taking ownership and we have heard these examples today, but we all know that COVID-19 has been an incredible wake-up call for all of us and restoring these school meals to the 370 million children who lost access and the 73 million who never had access must be a priority, a major priority for the international community. It must be at the heart of recovery programmes, and we are delighted to see such great support from partners here today including United Nations agencies, UNESCO earlier, NGOs, wonderful accounts from World Vision, research institutes and others that we have been hearing today and are doing so much good work in various contexts.

We know that their efforts will not be effective if there is also not the heart and the championing from national and subnational levels and all sectors can be engaged including this critical link that we also heard today between school feeding and local agriculture. We can have some win-win solutions making agriculture more productive and sustainable and feeding children and making them more productive and increase their well-being.



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The network of partners in the School Meals Coalition will support governments with overcoming bottlenecks and boosting key actions to scale such as evidence generation, sustainable financing and sharing lessons and best practices. And the Education Commission and the Global Education Forum are supporting the coalition to establish a sustainable financing task force, working closely with the other initiatives that we heard of earlier, the Research Consortium and the Peer-to-Peer Initiative.

The task force will have, we think, the funding mechanisms that help countries expand and accelerate their school health and nutrition programmes. There is an estimated financing gap of nearly USD 6 billion in financing for school health and nutrition programmes in low-income countries alone. This finance cannot be mobilized in conventional ways, we must enhance the effectiveness of existing investments and find innovative solutions and establish transitional mechanisms to help countries become self-reliant.

The initial proposals of the task force will be fed into the April meeting of the Global Education Forum of the major donors to education and also help shape the proposals of the Transforming Education Summit which we heard from earlier today as well will be gathered in September.

I would say Mr Brown and I are heartened by the efforts of governments and partners to support school meals and recognize the incredibly powerful role in fostering children's education, health, nutrition and well-being. Now more than ever it is urgent that we come together, and we come together at key moments this year because this year will be pivotal and there are lots of crises out there and this issue and the education issue that is highly connected to it, must be prioritized.

Thank you so much and I thank everyone here today for all the inspiring messages.

President: With that, we have now concluded our high-level segment. Your Excellency Angeline Ndayishimiye, it has been a great privilege to have you with us today. And I am sure that your voice and vision will contribute to further reinforce the school feeding initiatives across the globe. Allow me also to thank once again all our high-level participants for their invaluable contributions today. We will now resume the debate of our Board session.

