



## Africa Day of School Feeding: Strengthening Learning Through Nutritious, Healthy Home-Grown School Meals

Side event on the margins of the first regular session of the Executive Board, 2026  
Wednesday, 25 February 2026, 13:30–14:30  
Auditorium, WFP headquarters

### Context

Africa is home to the youngest population in the world, with nearly 60 percent of its people under the age of 25, a generation whose potential will shape the continent's future prosperity. Ensuring that every child can learn, grow and thrive requires investments that extend beyond the classroom and address the essential conditions for learning, including nutrition and a school environment that protects and promotes learners' health and wellbeing. Increasingly, African governments are adopting integrated school health and nutrition approaches that respond to learners' needs in a comprehensive manner.

Across Africa, school meal programmes have become powerful tools to advance these priorities. More than 86 million children now receive meals at school, and the region has seen the largest global expansion of school feeding, reaching 20 million more children in only two years according to the State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024<sup>1</sup>. This progress is driven by strong political commitment and significant domestic investment, with 83 percent of school meals financing in Africa now coming from national budgets. School meal programmes are also increasingly recognized as shock-responsive safety nets that help stabilize households during crises and strengthen social cohesion.

Home grown school feeding remains central to these efforts. By linking school meals to local agricultural production, countries are strengthening food systems, supporting farmers, enhancing community resilience and stimulating rural economies. For every 100,000 children reached, school meals generate an estimated 1,500 local jobs, demonstrating how these programmes support communities as well as learners. By anchoring programmes in local markets and shortening supply chains, home grown school feeding contributes to climate adaptation, food system transformation and more reliable access to nutritious and culturally appropriate foods.

African countries also lead the global school meals agenda. Over 40 African governments, together with the African Union, are active members of the School Meals Coalition, making Africa the most represented region in the movement. Several of the most ambitious national expansions worldwide are driven by African leadership and national investments, including Benin, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar and Rwanda.

The Eleventh Africa Day of School Feeding, to be hosted by the Government of Botswana on 28 February and 01 March, will take place under the theme: "Ensuring Access to Nutritious Meals, Clean Water and Hygiene: Promoting Safety and Resilience in Every School Meal Investment." This theme is fully aligned with the African Union's 2026 Theme of the Year, which focuses on assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems across the continent. The theme underscores that water, sanitation and hygiene are essential to safe, effective and resilient school meal programmes, from food production and preparation to children's health and learning outcomes. Access to safe drinking water is also an essential element of a healthy diet. Safe water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are especially critical for girls to attend school regularly and fully benefit from the opportunities provided by school meals.

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<sup>1</sup> WFP. 2025. *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024*.

The Rome celebration, traditionally held at the margins of the WFP Executive Board, provides a platform to recognise Africa's leadership, highlight the importance of delivering nutritious meals as part of resilient, integrated home-grown approaches, and renew partnerships to ensure that every child across the continent can rely on a safe and nutritious meal in school each day.

## **Objectives**

This session will commemorate the 11th Africa Day of School Feeding and highlight Africa's leadership in advancing safe, nutritious and resilient school meal programmes. It will emphasize the importance of integrated approaches that respond holistically to learners' needs. It will underline the 2026 Africa Day of School Feeding theme, which connects nutritious meals with clean water and hygiene as essential foundations for every girl's and boy's learning and well-being,

1. Celebrate Africa's leadership in advancing national school meal programmes and in shaping global action through the School Meals Coalition, where African countries make up the most represented region.
2. Highlight the 2026 Africa Day of School Feeding theme, emphasising the importance of linking nutritious meals with clean water, sanitation and hygiene to improve children's health and learning outcomes, and highlight how safe water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are essential for girls to attend school and fully benefit from school meals.
3. Showcase national progress and innovation, including home-grown and integrated approaches that strengthen food systems, support farmers and build resilience in communities.
4. Reinforce partnerships among African Member States, the African Union, WFP and the United Nations Rome-based agencies, while announcing the hosting of the School Meals Coalition Taskforce Ministerial Meeting in 2026 and mobilizing collective support toward ensuring that every child has access to a safe and nutritious daily meal in school.

## **Agenda (draft)**

### **13:30 Opening and welcoming remarks**

- Ms Cindy McCain, Executive Director, WFP

13:35 Video – H.E. Ms Keuang Nono Kgafela-Mokoka, Minister of Child Welfare and Basic Education, Botswana

### **13:40 Moderated roundtable**

Moderator: H.E. Tanguy Stehelin, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations Rome-based agencies

- H.E. Haladou Salha, Ambassador, Senior Technical Advisor to the Group of Rome-based African Ambassadors, African Union
- H.E. Ms Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Rome-based agencies, Angola
- H.E. Fredrick Lusambili Matwang'a, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Rome-based agencies, Kenya (TBC)
- Ms Gérardine Mukeshimana, Vice-president, IFAD
- Ms Lynnette Marie Neufeld, Director, Food and Nutrition Division, FAO

### **14:15 Q&A and remarks from the floor**

### **14:25 Closing remarks**

- Mr. Matthew Hollingworth, Assistant Executive Director, Programme Operations, WFP

14:30 **End event**