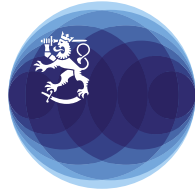25.09.2023
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Review of the process leading to the formation of the School Meals Coalition (SMC)

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

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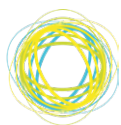# Review of the process leading to the formation of the School Meals Coalition (SMC)

Author(s)	Aynalem Megersa, Befikadu Ejeta, Elina Oinas, Theo Kauranen		
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Abstract

School meals are delivered to more children than at any time in human history, making school feeding the most extensive social safety net in the world. School meal programs contain positive spin-off effects in various areas of global development (e.g. gender equality, local agriculture, green transition, public infrastructure, funding efficiency) and contribute to various Agenda 2030 SDGs. There is a rapid growth in programmes, reflecting both the global attention and appreciation of this instrument but also its national nature – more than 90 per cent are domestic funds. Yet despite the importance of domestic interest and investment, global coalitions such as the global School Meals Coalition (SMC) continue to play a significant role.

The SMC was officially launched in 2021. It is a Member-State-led platform for governments and supporting partners to improve the quality, sustainability and scale of national school meals programmes and complementary interventions. So far, about 80 countries from the global North and South and about 90 partners have joined the coalition. Why do they join? What do they gain from a coalition?

This review was initiated by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland to investigate the forming process of the SMC: how and why the SMC emerged, its key features, structure, major achievements and key elements that have contributed to successes so far.

Kansainvälisen Kouluruokakoalition (SMC) muodostuminen ja nykytilanne – katsaus

Tiivistelmä

Nykyään yhä useampi lapsi ja nuori on kouluruokailun piirissä, mikä tekee kouluruokailusta maailman kattavimman turvaverkon. Kouluruualla on laajoja kerrannaisvaikutuksia yhteiskunnalliseen kehitykseen, esimerkiksi oppimiseen, tasa-arvoon, vihreään siirtymään, lähiruuantuotantoon, yrittäjyyteen, hyvään hallintoon ja kustannustehokkuuteen, ja sillä on vaikutusta usean Agenda 2030 -ohjelman kestävän kehityksen tavoitteen toteutumiseen. Kouluruokaohjelmien määrä on lisääntynyt viime vuosina huomattavasti, mikä on herättänyt huomiota ja arvostusta globaalin kehityksen kentällä, vaikka suurin osa toiminnasta ja kustannuksista onkin kansallista. Kansallisesta luonteestaan huolimatta kouluruokaohjelmiin liittyvällä kansainvälisellä yhteistyöllä on suuri merkitys. Kansainvälinen Kouluruokakoalitio, School Meals Coalition (SMC), perustettiin 2021. Siihen on liittynyt jo 80 maata ja 90 kumppanijärjestöä. Suomi on toiminut Ranskan rinnalla puheenjohtajamaana.

Tämän katsauksen on tilannut Suomen ulkoministeriö. Katsauksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, miksi koalitio perustettiin, miten se toimii, mitä annettavaa sillä on jäsenilleen ja miten sen kannattaa toimia jatkossa eri osallistujaryhmien kanssa. Katsauksessa tarkastellaan kansainvälisen löyhän koalition merkitystä toimijana globaalin kehityksen nopeasti muuttuvalla kentällä.

Översikt av den internationella Skolmatkoalitionens (SMC) begynnelseprocess och utformning

Referat

Aldrig har så många barn och unga som idag fått mat i skolan, vilket gör skolmaten till dagens globalt mest spridda sociala skyddsnät. Skolmaten har ett flertal positiva samhälleliga spin-off effekter, till exempel inom jämställdhet, hållbarhet, ekologisk närmat, företagsamhet, god förvaltning och effektiv resursanvändning, och den bidrar till ett flertal mål i Agenda 2030. Skolmatprogrammen har vuxit avsevärt under de senaste åren, vilket har väckt stor uppmärksamhet bland globala utvecklingsaktörer, trots att programmen för det mesta är nationell verksamhet som till nittio procent finansieras nationellt. Även om verksamheten till sin karaktär är nationell, är de internationella initiativen och samarbetsnätverken viktiga. Den internationella Skolmatskoalitionen grundades 2021, och åttio länder och nittio organisationer har redan anslutit sig till den. Finland och Frankrike har agerat som ordförandeländer sedan starten.

Denna översikt beställdes av Finlands utrikesministerium. Avsikten är att kartlägga bakgrunden till att koalitionen grundades, dess verksamhetsformer och strukturella lösningar, hur den fungerar och hur den kunde utvecklas enligt olika aktörer. Den diskuterar även internationella koalitioners roll i den globala utvecklingen.

Denna rapport är beställd som en del av UniPID Development Policy Studies (UniPID DPS), finansierad av Finlands Utrikesministerium (MFA), och hanterad av Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UniPID). UniPID är ett nätverk av finska universitet som etablerats för att stärka universitetens globala ansvar och samarbete med partner från det södra halvklotet, till stöd för en hållbar utveckling. UniPID DPS-verktyget stärker en kunskapsbaserad utvecklingspolicy genom att identifiera de mest lämpliga, tillgängliga forskarna för att svara på utrikesministeriets kunskapsbehov i rätt tid och att underlätta ett ramverk för en dialog mellan forskare och departementstjänstemän. Innehållet i denna rapport återspeglar inte Finlands utrikesministeriums officiella uppfattning. Ansvaret för informationen och åsikterna i rapporten ligger helt på författarna.

Contents

FOREWORD

School meals are the most widespread social safety net in the world. School meals are an essential part of a child's well-being and growth. There is a need to invest in child health, nutrition, and education throughout the first 8,000 days of life if children are to grow up to fulfill their potential as adults. A nutritious food provided in schools is among the best investments for equity and in the economic and social welfare of the entire society.

The School Meals Coalition convenes Member States and partners such as UN organisations, non-governmental organisations, and academic institutions to work together to improve the quality, sustainability, and scale of national school meal programmes and complementary interventions. The Coalition, led jointly by Finland and France, has successfully gathered more than 80 countries to work towards achieving the goal that every child has the opportunity to receive a healthy, nutritious meal in school by 2030.

This review commissioned by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, seeks to illuminate the Coalition's inception, its enduring momentum, and the tangible impacts achieved in its initial 18 months. The review not only uncovers the strategies behind the Coalition's success but also offers evidence-based insights into its progress. Highlighting Ethiopia and Rwanda as case studies, it underscores the pivotal role played by governments in prioritizing school meals at the national level and the influence of the School Meals Coalition in shaping these efforts.

The review identifies three crucial factors as catalysts for the Coalition's success: structure and member engagement; conducive policy environments; and the characteristics of school meals as a topic. Collaboration, a shared vision, information exchange, regular meetings, and coordinated communication surface as cornerstones for success.

With resounding evidence of the coalition's effectiveness, the review's primary recommendation is to support the mobilization of UN member states and non-state actors for improving the quality and sustainability of school meal programs, while bolstering the integration of local food producers, thus generating local economic growth. Furthermore, the review offers specific recommendations aimed at perpetuating and optimizing the Coalition's momentum and ensuring its long-term viability.

Beyond its immediate scope, this review provides valuable lessons for coalition-building on a broader scale. It serves as an example of the potential of diverse stakeholders uniting behind shared objectives, exchanging knowledge, and coordinating efforts to realize common goals. As we navigate the complex landscape of global challenges, the School Meals Coalition stands as a compelling model for effecting positive change through collaboration and collective action.

Titta Maja-Luoto
Director General
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1   Executive summary

The school meal is one of the most rapidly growing success stories in global development in the 2020s. According to the WFP, at the beginning of 2020, national school feeding programmes delivered school meals to more children than at any time in human history, making school feeding the most extensive social safety net in the world. School meal programmes also contain spin-off effects in various areas (e.g. local agriculture, green transition, entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, public infrastructure and funding efficiency). The rapid growth in programmes reflects both global attention and appreciation of this instrument, but also a widespread institutionalisation of national policies: more than 90 percent of the cost of school feeding now comes from domestic funds. Despite the domestic nature of this and many other development concerns, global initiatives and coalitions such as the global School Meals Coalition (SMC) continue to play a significant role. This study argues that thematic multilateral cooperation like the SMC can move away from donor-recipient dynamics, and beyond questions of ownership to multilateral sharing by focusing on policy dialogues on a universally recognised issue, with multiple avenues for action according to local priorities, and with multiple spin-off beneficiaries rather than competitors. A coalition that can establish a spiral of positive impact despite a narrow thematic focus can generate multistakeholder interest and be sustainable over time.

The SMC was officially launched at the UN Food Systems Summit in September 2021. It is a Member State-led platform for governments and supporting partners to improve the quality, sustainability and scale of national school meals programmes and complementary interventions. To date, about 80 countries from the global North and South, and about 90 partners, have joined the Coalition. Its main goal is that all schoolchildren will have access to healthy and nutritious school meals by 2030.

This review was initiated by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland to investigate the process leading to the formation of the SMC. It seeks to explain how and why the SMC emerged, its important features and the resulting governance structure, the major achievements of the Coalition, and the key elements that contributed to its successes so far. The report further aims to forward important points to be noted on how to track and document results and draw general recommendations that help to ensure its

effectiveness. The study, conducted in March–June 2023, employed a survey, interviews and a document review to generate the qualitative and quantitative data required to meet its objectives. Ethiopia and Rwanda are presented as case studies.

The review maps the rapid development of the SMC and shows that 95 percent of members deem the SMC successful. A growing number of countries and partners have joined the Coalition, with the numbers changing quickly as new member countries and partners are joining the Coalition at a steady pace. The major achievement of the SMC is that it has achieved its first objective, i.e. access to school meals programmes lost during the pandemic has been restored and the coverage has already surpassed that of the pre-COVID status. Countries have also increasingly shown a policy commitment to scale up and improve the quality of national programmes through various interventions. These include an actual or planned increase in domestic financing, scaling up the coverage of school meals programmes, increasing the amount of food bought locally and strengthening the connection to smallholder farmers, cooperatives and local economies, striving to put in place an appropriate institutional and policy framework, and the development and testing of approaches to shift towards more nutritious options for school meals, boosting local economic opportunities and addressing environmental sustainability. The SMC has also mobilised bilateral collaboration, facilitating engagement between actors as a platform for countries to draw support from partner organisations. The contribution of the Coalition is well acknowledged among member countries and partners. This was especially articulated when citing the benefits drawn from the information sharing and advocacy work of the Coalition and diverse support and services provided by the different initiatives. The data further shows that during the Coalition's short life span, substantive political will has been mobilised on global and regional platforms.

The study identified three major aspects that have contributed to the success of the Coalition, in terms of its establishment achievements so far: internal features of the Coalition and the actors that comprise it (leadership, structure, composition and issue framing); external environmental factors (COVID-19 context, allies and opponents, funding and policy context); and the particular characteristics of the issue it addresses (severity, tractability and affected group). A number of important lessons can be drawn from the closer scrutiny of the process leading to the formation and development of the SMC in order to successfully initiate and ensure the effectiveness of global multilateral networks.

First, a key group of high-level political actors, primarily from countries that have proved that the thematic problem of concern can be solved and shown strong commitment, both currently and historically, are needed to start and drive the process. These leaders need to understand the crucial role they play in defining the issue in a way that resonates with a broad array of potentially interested countries/partners, in bringing them together and,

once linked, guiding them towards advancing the agenda of achieving the shared goal. However, it also seems clear that behind these high-level figures is a strong institutional support that involves experienced government officials, diplomats and experts on multiple levels of the public sector.

Second, adopting a minimalistic and flexible approach in the network's governance structure with a strong, even if small, secretariat office is crucial. This helps run the network smoothly with limited organisational resource requirements and continuously identify and introduce to the network committed and strategic actors. The key role that the presence of a strong and active taskforce plays in the crystallisation of global networks and carry on the momentum cannot be overemphasised. Furthermore, adopting a clear principle for the Coalition with clearly identified goals and the affected groups and well-articulated spin-off effects in a way that asserts the multisectoral nature of the thematic focus played a key role in generating interest among various actors and avoiding negative competition.

Third, the study also reveals the significance of the composition of the network in determining its success. The Coalition adopts a multistakeholder approach instead of moving the issue through a single entity; but with a larger focus on country-led action. This government-led and partner-supported approach has enhanced governments' ownership of the issue with special recognition of actions by all stakeholders, including international organisations, academia, civil society and the private sector. The SMC's focus on creating a platform for advocacy, support and peer learning between countries/ governments rather than prioritising the issue of funding provision helps to avoid donor-recipient dynamics that could have negatively impacted the Coalition.

Fourth, the experience of the SMC indicates that a solid research evidence base is needed to motivate and support the actors and convince the hesitant. Highly regarded and the most reliable research institutions should be engaged. The evidence base is most useful when it covers a wide range of topics, facilitating dynamic framing of the issue, establishing multistakeholder interest and showcasing the spiral of positive impact of the theme under consideration. Ensuring efficient communication and access to the research is crucial in motivating further action.

The study generally showed that the SMC is a model case for a new type of global partnership/coalition, as it works in an assemblage with regional, national and local actors, as well as other stakeholders. It is currently doing a commendable job of mobilising and engaging UN Member States and non-state actors. In light of this highly positive data on the success and impact of the SMC, and the Coalition is still in its early years, our main recommendation is to continue along the same path, especially with the already existing awareness of rapid changes in the global context and among key actors. A coalition of this kind needs its key drivers both on the institutional and individual levels, however

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much the emphasis is on governments. The Coalition is encouraged to intensify its effort to improve the quality of the school meals by promoting healthy and nutritious meals for all school meals recipients, and to improve the integration of local food producers in strengthening the school meals systems, and thus local economic growth. In order to be able to consolidate and build on the achievements so far, the SMC should continue to raise the issue of sustainability of school meals programmes and ensure the continuity of the work of the Coalition. In the light of this overall recommendation, the study outlined a number of specific recommendation points that need to be given due attention in the future.

2   Introduction

2.1   Background

This review was initiated by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland to investigate the process leading to the formation of the School Meals Coalition (SMC). It was carried out in March–June 2023 by a team of four researchers. The need for the report is based on the rapid success of the SMC, to understand what has worked and what future challenges can be foreseen.

The school meal has rapidly become an item on global and national development agendas. A substantial 9 percent shift to school meal provision was noted between 2013 and 2020, with a 36 percent increase in low-income countries. According to the World Food Programme (2021, 16), at the beginning of 2020, national school feeding programmes delivered school meals to more children than at any time in human history, "making school feeding the most extensive social safety net in the world. One in every two schoolchildren, or 388 million children, received school meals every day in at least 161 countries from all income levels". In 2022, 418 million school children globally are beneficiaries of school feeding, and four million jobs were created in 85 countries. This growth reflects both global attention and appreciation of this instrument to combat malnutrition, but also a widespread institutionalisation of national policies: more than 90 percent of the cost of school feeding now comes from domestic funds (WFP 2021, 16).

Despite the domestic nature of this and many other development concerns, global coalitions such as the SMC continue to mushroom and, most likely, play a significant role. Coalitions are in this review defined as "deliberately constructed networks of actors having differing interests or values, priorities and goals, yet showing general or limited common objectives" (Dupont 1996, 47). Coalition building highlights the commonality of interests among parties, and possibly hides the complexity of multilateral transactions.

Global development initiatives are social processes in which continuity is a major challenge (Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness OECD/DAC 2005; e.g., Hasselskog & Schierenbeck, 2017; Development Policy Committee, 2019). The global School Meals Coalition, with states, the World Food Programme and other key organizations, is an interesting example of a new type of development initiative in the so-called "new development cooperation landscape" (Gore, 2013), with documented unforeseen success (Bundy, 2023) in fighting child malnutrition and supporting educational goals, covering the SDGs 1–5, 8, 10 and 17, and addressing especially girls. The SMC, however, has an

even more broad spectrum of development indicators on its pallet, including job creation, green economy and financing efficiency. The node between the global initiative and the national level is a feature that the SMC pays special attention to. How it does this remains to be studied.

There is ample and highly convincing documentation on the importance of school meals (WFP, 2022; Bundy, 2004), but there is little knowledge on what processes are needed so that meal can be provided to the 73 million children who do not yet have access. Social and political science research is lagging behind the nutritional and economic research. How does a global initiative best impact governments and regional and local actors? How are partnerships in policy processes and implementation guaranteed sustainability? The SMC is a model case of a global partnership/coalition (cf. Abrahamsen, 2004) as it seems to work in an assemblage with regional, national and local actors, as well as other stakeholders.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for School Meals
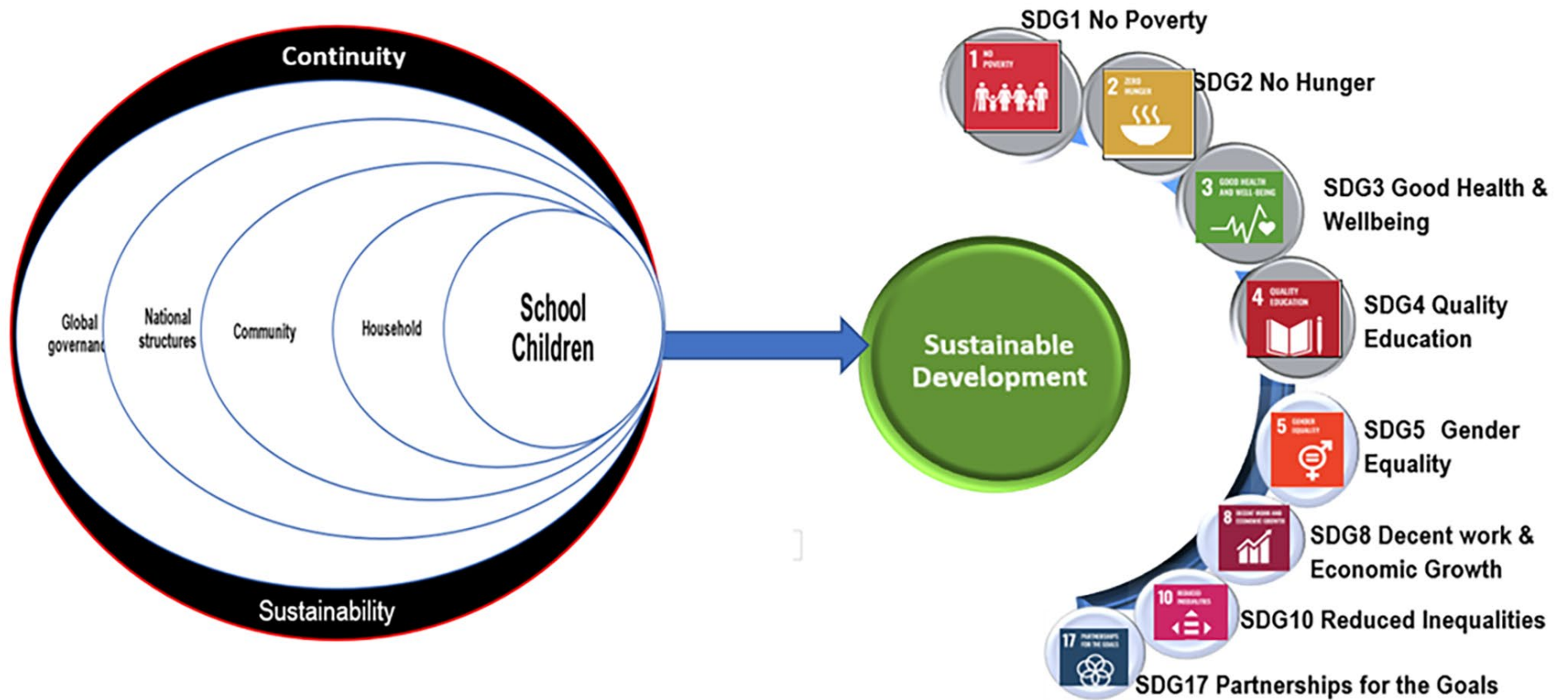
School meals are seen as having a specific gender impact as it has specific effects on girls' education and women's employment. Over the past two decades, giant strides have been made globally in girls' and women's education, but gender inequalities continue to be a major concern, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than one in four young women cannot yet read or write (UNESCO, 2022). In a region with little progress in the last 10 years, some countries, like Ethiopia, have made significant advances in education for girls. Substantial challenges remain, particularly in terms of girls' progress, completion and learning. Girls especially from low-income families and in more rural and remote areas face the greatest difficulties (Tafere et al., 2022; Yorke, Rose & Pankhurst, 2021).

Factors within and beyond the school environment are found to impact girls' education (Colclough, Rose & Tembon, 2000; Mushi & Makauki, 2010). School meals are seen as providing incentives for families to send their children to school, based on the notion that child education is among the key family matters that involve a household decision, which is thought to depend on the costs and benefits of basic education (Lincove, 2015; Becker, 2009; Colclough, Rose & Tembon, 2000). The costs depend both on the opportunity cost of a child's time, and on the direct costs of schooling. School meals encourage families to send their daughters as it reduces the associated costs in the household, ensuring the potential benefits (economic returns, social status, greater bargaining power, etc) (Yorke et al., 2021).

School meal programmes are considered not only as investments in human capital but also as a social safety net in less developed countries as they boost household income and savings by relieving parents of the costs of food commodities (World Bank, 2018). They also ease the time poverty that women often experience by lessening their domestic responsibilities, and ultimately allowing them to participate in income earning activities. It is imperative the linkages between school meals and different household livelihood outcomes including poverty and food security, among others, are examined.

According to the latest report on the State of School Feeding Worldwide, school feeding programmes in countries across all income categories provide new insights into employment dynamics (WFP, 2022). The report points out that in 2022, while 418 million school children globally benefitted from school feeding, 4 million jobs were created in 85 countries. Most of these jobs are related to the preparation of food, benefitting local cooks and small catering companies, most of them led by women. In Ethiopia, for example, the school meal programme in the capital city Addis Ababa alone has fed about 700,000 elementary school students and created jobs for 16,000 women (Ethiopian News Agency, 2023).

School feeding offers an opportunity for economically vulnerable and unemployed women to be engaged in food preparation, thus enabling income generation. However, while it is hoped that increased global investment in school feeding programmes will facilitate local development by potentially creating a large and predictable market for food, it still remains unclear if these jobs are sustainable and economically predictable, if the employment is secure and decent, and if the supply system is sustainable and green. For example, women in Ethiopia often have limited participation in the highly rewarding nodes along value chains. This is especially well documented in the gender analysis of agricultural value chains (FAO, 2019). The issues hampering low-income countries' scale-up of home-grown school feeding efforts are key elements in national programmes, with attention paid to gender in small-scale farming, logistics, preparing and ownership. How a global coalition may assist in this is a crucial question.

2.2   Objectives of the review

As stated in the ToR, this review aims to:

- document the development of the School Meals Coalition, from its inception to a functional international coalition;

- assess the impact of the School Meals Coalition's work on member countries' school meals systems (strategies, legislation, funding, beneficiaries, etc.); and

- propose a concrete process description for the School Meals Coalition to track and document its results in the future.

While the focus here is on the SMC, due to its mandate, the SMC itself cannot achieve anything alone without country level implementation. This challenged our research to include a few country case studies; however, a proper multi-level country study was not possible within the time frame. Two case countries, Ethiopia and Rwanda, were completed and are presented here to illustrate the attention given by governments to school meals at the national level, how the SMC has influenced the process and to discuss future areas of improvement.

2.3   Methods

This review employed mixed research methods. Quantitative and qualitative data were generated and analysed. A qualitative approach was given emphasis and a sociological snowballing method guided the data collection. The qualitative data was collected primarily through in-depth interviews with a total of 11 key individuals identified from the various entities related to the SMC. These included the Coalition leadership, the secretariat office, the initiatives and responsible officials from case study countries. Each interview was audio-recorded and follows a semi-structured format, focusing on the general issues related to school meals programmes at the national and global levels, the process leading to the formation of the SMC, its internal dynamics, achievements, challenges and future prospects, among other issues. The interview guide was supplemented by open-ended probes, prompts and regular memo-writing to maintain the data trail.

An online survey was administered to generate the quantitative data that helped get the views of the member countries and stakeholders in relation to their expectations when joining the Coalition, and the overall achievements so far. Two Google form questionnaires, with both multiple choice questions and free form responses were prepared and distributed to all member countries (80) and partners (90). The online survey was first prepared in English and later translated into French and Spanish upon the request of the respondents. A total of 56 respondents (31 member countries and 25 partners) responded to the survey. Most of the respondents (93 %) responded in English, some in French (3.6 %) and some in Spanish (3.6 %). Accordingly, the respondents were asked how long (months) has their country/organisation been participating in the Coalition. While the membership period ranged from four months to the formation of the Coalition, 32.1 percent of the respondents were members of the Coalition for more than 20 months, nearly half (48.2 %) of them for 12–20 months and the remaining (19.6 %) for less than a year.

Table 1. Membership period

How long (months) has your country/organisation participated in the School Meals Coalition (SMC)? [average = 17.70 months]	Freq.	%
Less than a year	11	**19.6**
12–20 months	27	**48.2**
More than 20 months	18	**32.1**
Total	**56**	**100.0**

A document review also lies at the heart of the methodological approach adopted in the study. A variety of academic literature on the issues related to school meals and the emergence and effectiveness of global networks was consulted. The other set of data consists of a large document study with more than 60 separate documents, comprising more than 500 pages if printed out. Most of the documents were internal emails and materials obtained from the relevant offices (MFA of Finland, the SMC secretariat office, initiative leaders, ministries in the case study countries, etc.). Additionally, a large bulk of publicly available material on the internet, including audio-visual materials on selected key events regarding the Coalition, were also reviewed. To the extent possible, the research team also attended important events related to school meals that took place during the study period (e.g. The 8th African Day of School Feeding celebration held in March 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and the launch event of WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022, on 21 March 2023, etc.).

Continuous assessment of the accumulated data and key stakeholder guidance drove the process. The interviews followed the TENK guidelines on ethics and reliability (TENK 2023). The interview guide was designed after first analysing the key documents and two consultations with the steering group. A sufficient number of respondents were needed to guarantee anonymity and minimise harm to respondents, and we believe this was achieved. The study has a human rights-based approach, and it strengthens gender equality, the reduction of inequalities and low emissions. The team is made up of specifically experts on gender (Aynalem Megersa, Oinas), human rights (Kauranen) and inequality (all). Low emissions were achieved by using only on-site interviews when the interviewer was already in the same location as the interviewee, which means mainly online data collection methods were used. The study had no travel component.

2.4   Theoretical understanding

The theoretical approach is based on Actor Network Theory (ANT) of social processes as dynamic assemblages (Latour 2005), where the research follows the process trajectories without prior notions of what matters, but looks for cues in the data. It is a dynamic and forward-looking framework for tracking efforts, the emergence of momentum and stagnation. It demands an open-minded view on impact. Here international organisations are not given ready, assumed roles. Adaptations, small moves and unexpected, less visible actors may play a significant role. ANT offers more room for process analysis with multiple agents compared to, for example, discourse analysis, which may initially stabilise the roles of the actors. Despite the limited time frame, ANT was a suitable theoretical framing, however, a more in-depth analysis of this highly interesting global initiative would be needed.

In our case, ANT was operationalised as follows: the stakeholder's articulation of their theory of change was distilled from the data and analysed as a desired assemblage description. It would ideally be contrasted with the described process pathways, adjustments to the theory of change; then again, concrete steps taken; and adaptations as they are described. Descriptions of implementation, reported inputs, outcomes and impacts were followed, as a trajectory of transformation and at times stagnation. The theory pays special attention to gaps, breaks, halts and silences. Institutional actors as well as individual key drivers, are made visible. The goal was to seek generalisable proposals for future actors. Based on ANT, the review can support new approaches to thematic multilateral cooperation. Now, some clear pathways were discerned, but as the Coalition is still less than two years old, long-term processes and country implementation cannot yet be followed.

3   Results

3.1   The development of the School Meals Coalition

3.1.1   General description of the Coalition

The School Meals Coalition (SMC) was officially launched at the United Nations Food Systems Summit in New York in September 2021. The Coalition is a Member State-led platform for governments and supporting partners (including UN organisations, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, etc.) working together under the same umbrella to improve the quality, sustainability and scale of national school meals programmes and complementary interventions. To date, about 80 countries from the global North and South and about 90 partners have joined the Coalition. Currently, the SMC is co-chaired by Finland and France. The Coalition secretariat works in the school-based programmes of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

The main goal of the SMC is to ensure that all schoolchildren will have access to healthy and nutritious school meals by 2030. As the SMC was formed during the COVID-19 pandemic, an initial objective in reaching this goal was to ensure that all those schoolchildren who were left without a daily school meal due to the closure of schools during the pandemic would be able to again receive school meals. The other objectives of the Coalition are scaling up the coverage of school meals programs to reach the 73 million children in the poorest countries who lacked access to school meals even before the pandemic and improving the quality of school meals programmes.

The SMC works as a network led by Member States and it is not a UN- or NGO-led initiative. The SMC's agenda is set by the states who volunteer to participate with different contributions and commitments, which determine their wishes and initiatives, rather than through a set road map and priorities shared by all. From its inception, the Coalition is structured through four main bodies: the Task Force, the Working Group, the Partner Group and the Secretariat. In addition to these, the SMC's work is structured through Initiatives.

The Member State-led Task Force is the decision-making body of the Coalition and it determines the overall strategic direction, sets annual priorities, provides guidance and leadership to the work of the Secretariat and the different initiatives of the Coalition, and leads on political advocacy and positioning. The Task Force is composed of focal points from the leading member countries that have demonstrated significant commitment to the Coalition including financial resources to sustain the coordination of the Coalition

and/or its initiatives, political support at the highest level (Head of State or Ministerial), support to outreach and advocacy activities, and commitments of time and effort to engage in hands-on direction of the Coalition. The current members of the Task Force are: the African Union, Brazil (since July 2023), Finland, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Kenya, Iceland, Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden, and the USA.

The Working Group is the larger and fully inclusive forum that encompasses all the member countries of the Coalition as well as the African Union and the European Union. This group is primarily a broad forum for information sharing and country experience, establishment and mobilisation of further partnerships and alliances between countries and with other partners and sharing of expertise and institutional support. It is a forum for providing country-level updates and success stories, providing a space for the consolidation of best practices and flagging progress on a country level. Such victories often remain uncelebrated on the national ministry level, so this platform can be a motivating space for public officials. Here requests are made and the provision of mutual support is offered, and respondents can learn from what other countries and partners are doing. Co-led by the permanent representatives of Finland and France in Rome, the Working Group also meets regularly, every other month.

The Stakeholder/Partner Group is the forum that encompasses all partner organisations of the Coalition. Similar to the Working Group, this is a broad forum for information sharing, mainly at the technical level. It meets every two months under the leadership of WFP. Participation in these meetings is seen as providing members with information about what is going on in the Coalition at different levels, and insights into progress with each of the initiatives (see below). The Partner Group is a potential pool of resources when expertise or assistance is needed at the country level, thus creating a network of external partners willing to be available when the need arises.

Although the Coalition aims to work with minimal administration, the Secretariat is a key body in the Coalition's structure. It is responsible for the overall organisation and management of the Coalition. In some interviews, the Secretariat was called the engine of the Coalition, but often, its role was downplayed in favour of the state actors. The WFP hosts the Secretariat through augmented capacity in its School-based Programmes Division at the headquarters in Rome, which serves as the coordinating body for the Coalition. The Secretariat provides concrete support to Member States and stakeholders that are participating in the Coalition, maintains and develops relationships, and keeps members informed and connected. This includes outreach to new members, organising periodic meetings and events, keeping stakeholders informed, empowered and motivated, and helping to connect initiatives and avoid the duplication of efforts. The WFP also manages the Coalition's website, social media channels and newsletters, ensuring that all members have access to key documents, calendars of events and social media assets for effective advocacy. It also provides support to the Coalition's initiatives, most of them led by other partners.

Figure 2. Main Bodies of the SMC (Source: School Meals Coalition)
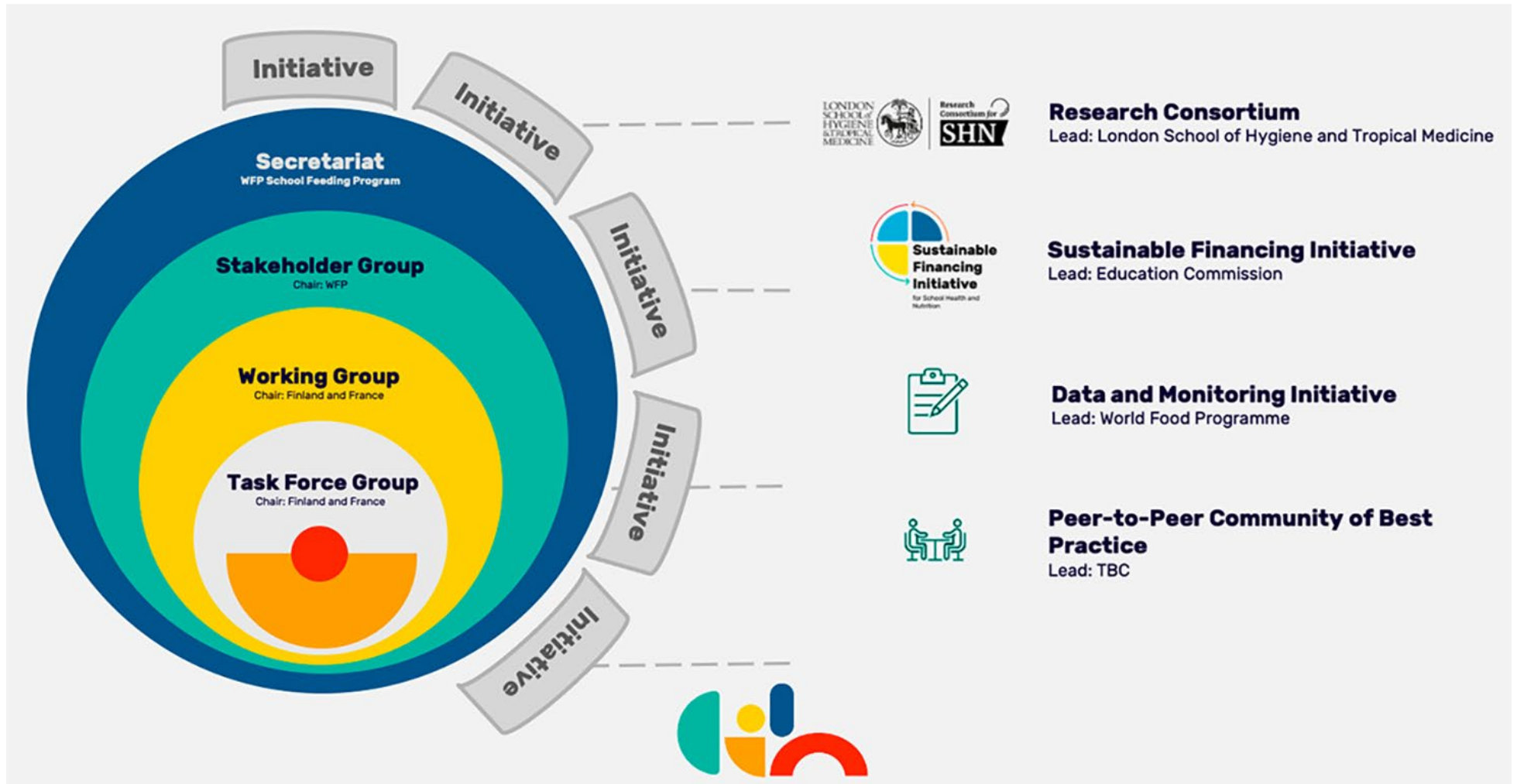
Another important aspect of the structure and operations of the Coalition is the role of different initiatives. Five initiatives were initially identified and designed to tackle the most significant challenges or bottlenecks to the implementation and scale up of programmes at the country level: *the Research Consortium (RC), the Sustainable Financing Initiative (SFI), the Monitoring and Data Initiative*, *the Peer-to-peer Community of Best Practice Initiative,* and *the Communication and Partner Outreach Initiative*. These global initiatives, led or co-led by a Coalition Member State or Partner, are composed of a variety of organisations and are funded by several partner organisations. The themes are proposed according to needs in Member States. Together, they form a network of support to countries and help in the implementation of the countries' commitments. Countries can access the work of the initiatives (guidance, evidence, technical support) and also join or help develop the work of the initiatives.

Among the initiatives, the most advanced and actively functioning initiative is the Research Consortium, which was launched in May 2021 and is led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). The Research Consortium collects and disseminates evidence for governments to support decision making. It also provides general evidence for why school meals make sense in terms of nutrition, poverty eradication, education, agriculture, public spending, the environment, etc.

The Sustainable Financing Initiative (launched in July 2022) is led by the Education Commission (https://educationcommission.org/). It provides information on resource mobilisation for school meal programmes. The Monitoring and Data Initiative is led by WFP and aims to create a database that systematically collects, stores and distributes up-to-date information about school meals, including health and nutrition. The other two initiatives, which primarily focus on sharing best practices and handling outreach and advocacy work, have not yet taken off properly. Nevertheless, efforts are underway to work in the field of peer learning through regional assemblies based on the interest and ownership of the countries. Additionally, outreach work is done all the time through the initiatives of the co-leaders of the Coalition, the Secretariat and various actors.

Leads from the initiatives provide periodic updates to member countries and gather inputs to enhance their support to countries and improve the quality and scale up of programmes through the Taskforce and Working Group meetings. They also connect with partners through the stakeholder group and other mechanisms and contribute to the Coalition newsletter and other news feeds as appropriate.

The main feature of the SMC is that its centre of gravity is governments, it is not a WFP-created or UN-led initiative. The governments here refer to the member countries which have signed a declaration of commitment. The government's engagement is often led by a Minister or Ambassador at a reasonably high level of influence. The stakeholders, which

include organisations such as UN agencies, NGOs, think tanks and advocacy groups, are Partners. Hence, under the Coalition's logic, governments lead and set the priorities. To join as a country, the Coalition encourages countries to sign the standard Declaration and provide an official national commitment, which can differ according to where the country is and wishes to head in terms of school feeding. Partners are expected to support these set priorities.

The Coalition in its principle clearly articulates that it is not about funding. The Coalition does not disburse resources for country actions, does not manage funding for programmes, or aim to fundraise. Rather, it focuses on pooling resources, which mainly refers to best practices, experience, information and technical support. It aims at addressing implementation bottlenecks, strengthening evidence for decision-making, providing opportunities for improved coordination and generating the political will and buy-in needed for change through advocacy.

Despite helping low-income countries establish and lead nationally owned and sustainable programmes is one of the Coalition's main priorities, the Coalition is not about low-income countries only. It also recognises the particular needs of high and middle-income countries which are committed to making school meals a domestic priority and improve their own programmes.

At implementation level, the Coalition is operationalised in two ways: through national commitments and through initiatives. The national commitments are expected to guide efforts on school meals and set priorities until 2030. Commitments are also a way for external partners to see what countries are interested in working on or improving and thereby helping them engage and converge around those commitments, hence channelling support more effectively. The national commitments are implemented by the government with the network of support provided by the Coalition of partners and the initiatives.

3.1.2 Major events and outputs

The data obtained from the document reviews and interviews show that a series of events have contributed to the emergence of the Coalition and its subsequent functioning. Two important publications that were published in 2020 stood out in laying the foundations for the need to adopt a broader understanding of school meals and the approaches to be followed to end child hunger and poverty. These were: the WFP School Feeding Strategy 2020–2030 (WFP 2020a) and the WFP report on the State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020 (WFP 2020b). The WFP developed its 10-year School Feeding Strategy on the basis of its decades of experience supporting school health and nutrition and through

an extensive consultative process with partners in the area. The strategy document articulates the importance of investing in the health and nutrition of schoolchildren and adolescents and the inadequacy of the existing approaches to investing in a nation's children. The significance of the strategy document is that it goes beyond setting out WFP's corporate level target for the 10- year period and identifying the required work streams to support the implementation of the strategy by introducing changes in the way the issue of school feeding and the associated interventions are understood. The document calls for an effective global response that involves adopting an integrated and multisectoral approach to school health and nutrition and acting in partnerships. It also emphasises the importance of strengthening national systems and plans through the institutionalisation and sustainability of efforts through a better understanding of national priorities and challenges.

The WFP publication on the state of school feeding report (WFP 2020) highlighted that, at the beginning of 2020, national school feeding programmes delivered school meals to more children than at any time in human history. This development, however, was brought to an end because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which at the height of the crisis in April 2020, 199 countries had closed their schools and 370 million children were suddenly deprived of what for many was their main meal of the day. The contribution of this report is that it provided an analysis of the state of school feeding in 2020, described the impact of COVID-19 on school feeding around the world and presented what can be done to restore this global safety net, hence drawing the attention of governments and global actors to the issue of school meals.

Following the series of consultative discussions, in March 2021, WFP and the government of Finland released an announcement on "building a coalition to support school feeding worldwide"[1] and forwarded a call to more governments and partners joining the Coalition over the next months. This is framed as the first step toward fulfilling the WFP 2020 report's recommendation for a coalition to support governments in the reintroduction and scale up of school meals programmes following COVID-19. This initiative was further galvanised with the joining of France (subsequently leading to the establishment of the Coalition co-leadership with Finland), the AU and several other member countries and partners. The establishment of the research consortium (one of the SMC's initiatives) and the UN Food Systems Pre-Summit, where the concept note of the Coalition was agreed upon, were among the major events that happened during the next few months leading up to the launch of the Coalition at the World Food System Summit in September 2021.

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1   https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-and-government-finland-begin-building-coalition-support-school-feeding-worldwide

After the launch of the Coalition, in addition to the different regular meetings of the Coalition Task Force, Working Group and Partners group, an annual, high-level meeting is planned. The first ministerial-level meeting of the Task Force was organised by Finland in Helsinki on 18 October 2022. The meeting brought together ministers and representatives from 13 countries[2] with key partners of the Coalition[3] , with the goals of building political will and support for school meals globally and empowering a robust group of allies and champions behind the Coalition. The first Global Ministerial Meeting for all members of the Coalition is planned and will be hosted by France in October 2023. The Coalition also hosted the inaugural School Meals Coalition Week (10–14 October 2022), an event that was used as a platform to showcase activities, best practices and lessons learned of governments and partners.

Table 2. Major developments in the emergence and functioning of global School Meals Coalition

Date	Event
January 2020	WFP School Feeding Strategy 2020–2030 was published
February 2021	WFP published State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020
March 2021	Announcement of WFP and the Government of Finland on "building a coalition to support school feeding worldwide"
May 2021	Research Consortium was established
July 2021	UN Food Systems Pre-Summit – SMC concept note was agreed upon
Sept 2021	UN Food Systems Summit – SMC formally launched
October 10–14 2022	SMC hosted the inaugural School Meals Coalition Week
October 2022	First ministerial-level meeting of the Task Force was organised by Finland in Helsinki
2023	A school meals indicator was included in the SDG 4 indicator framework

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2   The meeting brought together ministers and representatives from 13 countries (Finland, France, Honduras, Guatemala, Iceland, Japan, Kenya, Norway, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sweden, UAE, USA

3   Key partners of the Coalition (Dubai Cares, Education Commission, Food for Education, Global Partnership for Education, Office of the Special Advisor on Africa to the UN Secretary General, Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, Rockefeller Foundation)

Regarding the less outwardly advisory role, the official documents record that 28 countries have used the services and support of the Coalition and its initiatives, especially the Research Consortium and the Sustainable Financing Initiative (SMC, 2022). In these countries, more than 70 services were provided, which include establishing national coalitions, preparing national influence plans, conducting country-specific case studies and/or agricultural analysis, carrying out impact studies, preparing national financing plans and/or financing proposals, and carrying out value for money studies. The Data and Monitoring Initiative is currently developing a global school meals database as a global public good, which will help improve and institutionalise the availability of quality data on national school meal programmes worldwide.

The other outputs of the Coalition are related to measures taken by the Coalition to increase its visibility and recognition. In this regard, the Coalition has positioned school meals and school health and nutrition in important high-level discussions through its participation in several global initiatives and several regional high-level meetings. The Secretariat developed and shared a Communications Toolkit which includes a standard PowerPoint on the SMC, talking points for future engagements, key documents of the Coalition and a list of frequently asked questions to help promote and explain the Coalition. The SMC has actively offered member countries messages about school meals, which it hopes the member countries will highlight in international forums. It also used the Coalition's virtual "celebration week", where member countries and partners organised various events. The week brought together 91 partners, 133 speakers and over 550 respondents from around the world. Members of the Coalition's Stakeholder Group launched a Call to Action. Furthermore, The SMC has also developed its own websites[4], thus contributing to its increased visibility and recognition.

3.1.3 The School Meals Coalition's Dynamics Explained: The Theory of Change

From the document review and the primary data collected through surveys and interviews, the following chain regarding the Theory of Change can be discerned:

A process of coalition building is needed to create awareness about the importance of school meals. A key group of high level political actors are needed to start and drive the process. They should come from countries where school meals are well established and the importance has strong support, both currently and historically. These leaders need to understand the key role they play. Funding provision is to be excluded and the focus is on

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4   https://schoolmealscoalition.org/

advocacy and support between countries/governments, to avoid an unrealistic dynamic. If the momentum with key leaders is reached, wide and high-level engagement can be secured.

A secretariat is needed but kept to a minimum and responsibilities are shared. The importance of a skilful secretariat is recognised and targeted strategic recruitment of key expert drivers, and a dynamic resourceful host organisation with excellent contacts with the field, is crucial. If seed funding can be secured and staffing is successful, state level participation will be supported.

At the same time, a solid research evidence base is needed to motivate and support the actors, and convince the hesitant. Highly regarded and the most reliable research institutions should be engaged. The evidence base is most useful when it covers a wide range of topics, establishing multistakeholder interest and showcasing the spiral of positive impact of school meals. If the research is communicated in a fast and accessible manner, it will motivate further action.

The Coalition needs a task force to carry on the momentum. The Coalition is to be launched and new members are invited. If their commitments can be of different quality and touch upon different needs, depending on the country-specific nature of the school system, the commitments are feasible and lead to action. If the Coalition is structured so that it remains flexible and the governments are the main drivers, momentum and a sense of achievement is maintained.

If the thematic focus, here the school meal for a child, is established as simple enough yet multisectoral, the overall goal remains achievable and interesting for different kinds of regimes. If an easily recognisable target that has global emotional recognition value is established, political tensions are less prominent. Everyone can relate to such a target, yet most sectors have something to gain from success. If the spin-off effects are communicated clearly, the Coalition's goals generate interest among various actors and negative competition is avoided.

If the Member States are encouraged to suggest initiatives, the resources are invested in the right themes. As funding is an obvious one, it needs to be generated from existing resources. Funding is most feasible if obtained from domestic sources. Next, a monitoring system is seen as a necessary step. Further, regional hubs and peer-to-peer advice is envisioned in order to guide the implementation. If government officials use international events as platforms to showcase their best practices and lessons learned, the institutional structures within these countries are also consolidated, and officials who rarely get international visibility are rewarded and motivated. This creates positive enforcement of existing development on the national level, yet it is not necessarily credited to the SMC.

To ensure support for the Coalition and especially its targets, a high-level political field is mobilised with, for example, talking points and constant engagement and visibility of the topic. Support from like-minded partner organisations is ensured by creating a partners group with regular meetings. The difficult issue of the sustainability of the Coalition when actors change due to democratic transitions or diplomatic change is maintained by a number of active respondents, so that when champions resign, others step up.

As the report was requested to analyse if the Theory of Change drafted above was implemented and how it was amended, it must be stated that this coalition building is still in its very beginning phase. In many member countries, the national level steps are still in their infancy, so how the Theory of Change actually works from the global to the school level remains to be seen. Also, it remains to be seen how commitment and a balanced dynamic between actors is sustained in the long run. However, overall, the Theory of Change that we could establish from the documents and interviews is very well articulated and insightfully designed with many obstacles and challenges taken into account already at this early stage of the Coalition. This coherent and feasible Theory of Change is in itself a major achievement. It was not explicitly challenged in any of the interviews, even if it must be noted that our data are still rather limited in this regard. Especially the potential challenges from key partners, mid and local-level public administration, and children and their families should be further studied.

3.2   The impact of School Meals Coalition

3.2.1   Major achievements

The complexity of establishing and ensuring the effectiveness of global networks is well documented in the body of literature (Shiffman et al. 2016). Many respondents are aware of this fact and articulate the success of the Coalition by valuing the successful launch and survival of the Coalition so far. As one participant put it, "The fact that the Coalition existed and has sustained is a big achievement by itself". It was also noted that the Coalition has achieved its first objective, i.e., access to school meals programmes lost during the pandemic has been restored and the coverage has already surpassed that of the pre-covid situation (WFP, 2022).

Four Coalition initiatives have been established and are already providing evidence and guidance to countries to support their commitments and progress. The initiatives have been engaged in generating awareness of the school meal as a societal solution to multiple problems, and also knowledge on what school feeding means and what societal and health effects it has. Further, the SMC has clearly generated knowledge on the school meal and its significance as a multisectoral solution to addressing political and education

crises, transforming food systems and strengthening the future of welfare for various target groups through producing academic papers, case studies of member countries, white papers, etc.

The success of the Coalition is demonstrated by the growing momentum among governments and partners, with 80 countries from the global North and South and 90 partners signed on to the Coalition's goals and objectives in less than two years. Although not all countries have achieved instant success, progressed is being made. With its single and new vision, the School Meals Coalition has already changed the landscape, bringing a new multilateral narrative to development and a new focus on recovery from COVID-19 – not only on educating the generation, but also on well-being, health (including mental health) and the creation of human capital. Survey respondents were asked to rate how successful the SMC has been at advancing the school meals agenda globally. Accordingly, as shown in Figure 4, almost all (95 %) of respondents reported that the SMC is either very successful (43 %), successful (38 %) or somewhat successful (14 %) at advancing the school meals agenda globally.

Figure 3.   Overall success of SMC at advancing school meals agenda globally
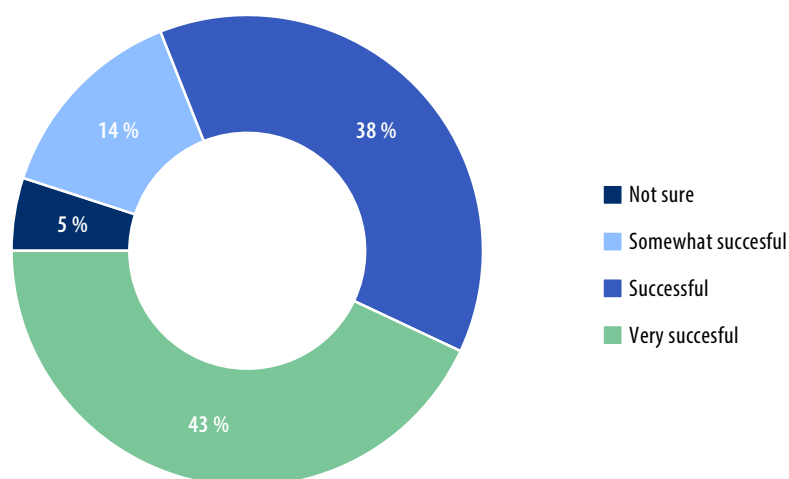
Data shows that political commitment to school feeding has been growing around the world. This can easily be noted from the initiatives taken by the governments. To date, about 20 member countries have formally submitted ambitious national commitments to the Coalition, and many of them are already implementing actions (SMC, 2023). Countries have shown a strong policy commitment to scaling up the reach and to improve the quality of national programmes through various interventions. These include an actual

or planned increase in domestic financing (e.g. Rwanda, Benin, Senegal, Guatemala), scaling up the coverage of school meals programmes (Rwanda, Benin, Kenya), an increase in the amount of food bought locally, and thereby strengthening the connection to smallholder farmers (e.g. Rwanda, Malawi, Niger and Ethiopia), striving to put in place appropriate institutional and policy frameworks (Kenya, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Zimbabwe), and the development and testing of approaches to shift towards more nutritious options for school meals, thus boosting also local economic opportunities, with effects on environmental sustainability (Benin, Ghana, Honduras). The following quote underscores that the already existing interest in school feeding in Ethiopia was enhanced by membership in the SMC:

"*We have been working on quality education for years and we cannot achieve educational objectives without school feeding. Hence SMC membership enables the country [Ethiopia] to share experiences and learn from other member countries for improving the programme and achieving the 2030 target.*"

While most of these reported achievements are planned to take place on a national level, the SMC also mobilised bilateral collaboration by assisting actors in finding each other or countries drawing support from partners. For example, the document review showed that the Coalition has facilitated mobilisation of strategic investment from donors (Rockefeller Foundation, Dubai Cares, Norway, etc.). Thus, while the SMC itself does not cater for funding mechanisms, it enables matches between interested parties for mutual collaboration, albeit, thus far at least, little with the profit-seeking private sector.

The survey respondents similarly acknowledged the contribution of the Coalition to action at the country level. They were asked how helpful their country's membership/ organisation's partnership for engagement in school meal programmes. About 75 percent of the respondents mentioned that their country's membership/organisation's partnership in the SMC has helped them in some way in their engagement in school meal programmes. Only 20 percent were not sure whether it is helpful and 9 percent indicated their country's membership in SMC/organisation's partnership with the SMC was not helpful for engagement in school meal programmes (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Importance of School Meals Coalition membership for engagement in school meal programmes
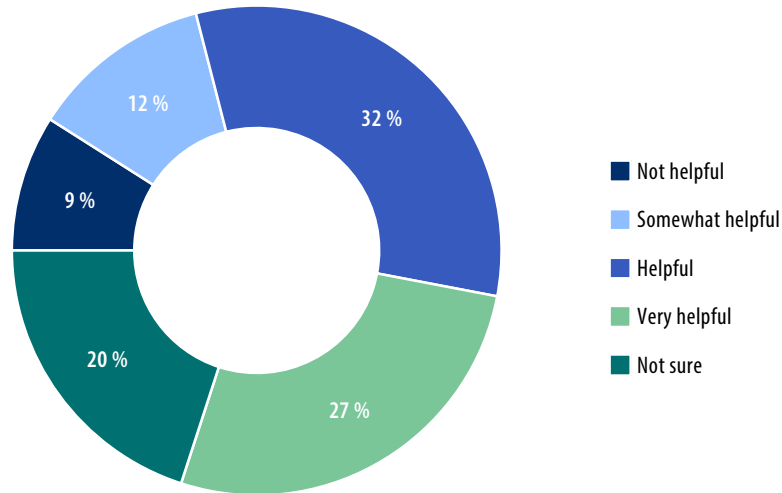
Respondents that have acknowledged the contribution of the Coalition in relation to their engagement in school meals programmes were then asked to indicate the major area of influence of the Coalition. Accordingly, increased information sharing and increased advocacy by the Coalition were reported by 67.7 percent and 65 percent of the study respondents, respectively, as the major areas of influence of the SMC in the school meals programme in their country. Moreover, adopted policy (32.5 %), put in place appropriate institutional arrangement (30 %), increased own resource allocation (27.5 %) and increased resource mobilisation from other sources (27.5 %) were reported as the SMC's areas of influence in school meals programmes.

Figure 5. SMC membership and partnership areas of influence

How was the SMC helpful for the countries/partners?

Category	Value
Increased information sharing	67,5
Increased advocacy	65,0
Adopted policy, law and/or regulation related to school meals	32,5
Put in place appropriate institutional arrangement	30,0
Increased own resource allocation	27,5
Increased resource mobilization from other sources	27,5
Others	5,0
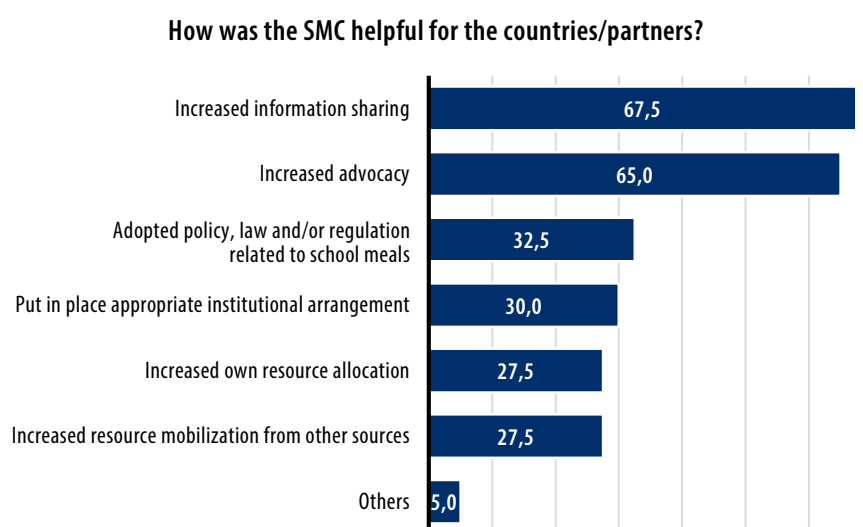
The data further shows that during its short life span, the Coalition has mobilised substantial political will on global and regional platforms. The Coalition positioned school meals and school health and nutrition in important high-level discussions: G20 (2021–2022), SMC week 2022, Regional meetings in 2023 in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This has played a key role in the inclusion of school meals programmes in the main outcome of recent global events. For example, at the Transforming Education Summit (September 2022), school meals were included in the Vision Statement of the UN Secretary-General (UN 2022), mentioned in more than one-third of the country commitments submitted to the Summit, featured in the Rewiring Education for People and Planet Report (Dubai Cares and Education Commission 2022) that was launched at the summit, and were also emphasised in the African Declaration.

The recent inclusion of school meals among the key indicators of the SDG4 framework is also among the key success indicators that facilitates the legitimacy of the agenda in global development discourse and actions. Various global initiatives have increasingly stepped up their support for the school meals agenda. For example, the Global Partnership on Education (GPE) announced collaboration with WFP to provide technical support to countries to establish sustainable and multisectoral school meals and school health and nutrition programmes.

The contribution of the SMC can also be explained in view of the narrative it uses in relation to school meals, hence facilitating the broader framing of the term itself. The following are among the key principles of the Coalition in relation to school meals that have the potential to transform the discussion of school meals, which was often boxed into the humanitarian/charity space:

- The issue of school meals is beyond feeding a child. This refers to the important role that school meals play in diverse areas, including food systems transformation, education, ensuring gender equity and a holistic approach to child well-being.

- The issue of school meals is beyond the children themselves. This means that school meals have a multidimensional impact on not only children but also families, national and local food systems, markets and economies, smallholder farmers, women, etc.

The nature of this coalition, however, makes it slightly questionable if it matters at all if achievements in the area of school meals are to be credited to the Coalition or to other actors, such as the governments themselves or an expert partner institution. Coalition-specific impact should not matter as the governments, so to say, own the Coalition and its goal is to be a platform for inspiration and peer advice. However, when assessing the documented growing number of children fed in educational institutions, as well as the commitments and serious plans made in countries around the world during the period of existence of the Coalition, there is no doubt that the SMC must have been a serious catalyst. Therefore, it is less fruitful to demand demarcation and definite naming of influence in many cases of obvious movement. Further, it is closer to the spirit of the Coalition to discuss influence, and not the more straight-forward impact, and acknowledge that every effort has multiple actors and every success several small steps behind it.

3.2.2 Major factors contributing to the emergence and achievements of the coalition

The literature shows that discerning the effectiveness of global networks in general is a complex process that involves analysing outputs, policy consequences and impact (Weiss 1972; Wholey 1983; Sabatier & Weible 2014). This is more so for the SMC, a young global initiative which is less than two years since its formation. Short of claiming the impact of the Coalition, which requires detailed analysis, in relation to meeting the ultimate objective of improvement in school children's health and nutrition during the specified period, an attempt was made in the previous section to present, to the extent possible, the outputs (the immediate products of the Coalition's activity) and policy consequences that relate to global and national policy processes, including international resolutions, funding, national policy adoption and the scaling up of interventions. Hence, notwithstanding this limitation in the discussion related to the effectiveness of the Coalition, this section attempts to identify the major factors that contributed to the achievements of the Coalition to date.

Consistent with the arguments in the literature (Shiffman et al. 2016), the data shows that three major factors have contributed to the success of the Coalition, in terms of its achievements so far. These factors are: features of the Coalition and the actors it is comprised of, the policy environments, and the particular characteristics of the issue it addresses.

Figure 6. Key factors related to the emergence and achievements of the SMC

- Severity
- Tractability
- Affected group

Issue characteristics

External Environmental Factors

Coalition and actors features

Coalition emergence and Effectiveness

- COVID-19
- Allies and opponents
- Funding
- Policy context

- Leadership
- Governance
- Composition
- Issue framing
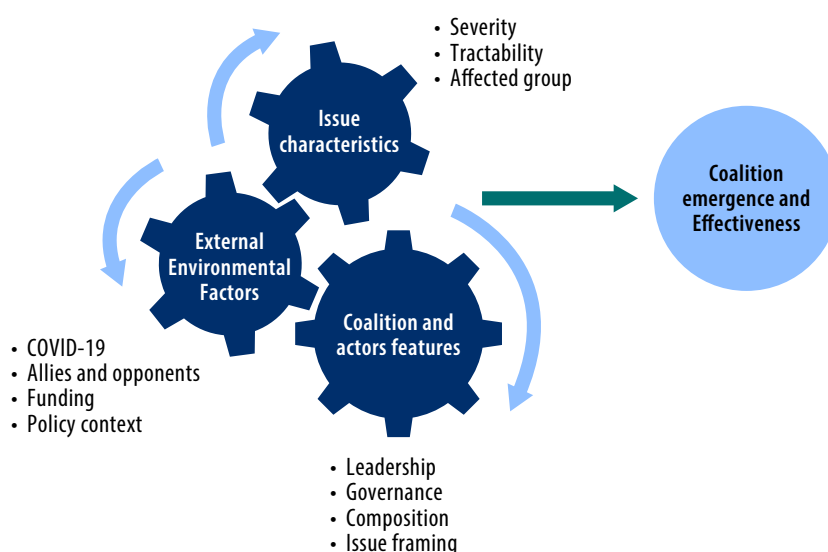
(Source: adopted from Shiffman et al. 2016)

a) Internal factors: the Coalition and actors

The existence of effective leadership was found to be among the key reasons for the crystallisation of the Coalition and its achievements so far. The interviewees especially cite the role of the WFP (David Beasley, WFP Executive Director, and Carmen Burbano), France (President Emanuel Macron) and Finland (Ville Skinnari, Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade), among others. These high-level officials were acknowledged as having played a crucial role in defining the issue in a way that resonates with a broad array of potentially interested countries/partners, in bringing them together and, once linked, in guiding them towards advancing the common agenda and thus achieving the Coalition's goal: improved health and nutrition among schoolchildren. However, it also seems clear to us that behind the high-level figures was strong institutional support in the form of experienced government officials, diplomats and experts on multiple levels of the public sector.

The strength of the governance structure of the Coalition was found to be another important feature that has contributed to its success. Governance concerns how an organisation steers itself to achieve the goals its members have agreed to (Buse & Walt 2000). Following discussions and inputs after its launch, the Coalition favoured a minimalistic and flexible approach towards its own structure. This has helped the Coalition to be run with limited organisational resource requirements and continuously identifying and bringing on board committed and strategic actors. For example, Kenya joined the Task Force at a later stage as the newest member in recognition of its commitment to advancing school meals and its potential contribution to the Coalition's objectives based on its successes and experiences so far. It was mentioned that similar efforts are underway for other countries that are believed to have a strategic importance in the Coalition (e.g. Brazil – with a profile of rich experience in school meals programmes, currently favourable political system, and chairing the G20 – and India, though not a member yet). The flexible structure of the Coalition has also facilitated cross fertilisation of efforts across different groups in the structure (Task Force, working groups, Partners, the Secretariat and initiatives) with the meetings as platforms to scale up the momentum (sharing best practices, information, etc.). The respondents also mentioned that the presence of a strong, even if small, Secretariat office with expertise on global coalition processes and excellent networks of experts has hugely contributed to the smooth running of the Coalition through its role in efficiently coordinating the major coalition-level activities and key decisions. The survey data on the respondents' overall rating of the effectiveness of the governance structure also generally show a positive assessment. Despite variation in the magnitude of approval, more than 75 percent of respondents reported that the governance setup of the Coalition is effective. Only a few of the respondents (3.6 %) indicated the SMC's institutional setup is not effective, while about one-fifth (19.6 %) of respondents were not sure about the matter.

The third important feature of the Coalition that has played a positive role in the Coalition's success is its composition. The SMC is a model case for a new type of global partnership/coalition, as it works in an assemblage with regional, national and local actors, as well as other stakeholders. The Coalition Task Force consists of active countries with the issue of regional diversity taken into account to the extent possible, avoiding unnecessary donor-recipient dynamics. The Coalition adopts a multistakeholder approach instead of moving the issue through a single entity (e.g. the WFP or any other organisation), but with a larger focus on country-led action. This helps avoid the possibility for competition among different stakeholders and enhances governments' ownership of the issue. Under one of the Coalition's principles, government-led, partner-supported, it was stated that "… progress will also require action by all stakeholders, including international organisations, academia, civil society and the private sector." This diversity in its composition combined with inspiring leadership and coordination is regarded as an asset as it facilitates countries to benefit from the potential of the diverse actors, hence accelerating progress at the national level. In support of this, most of the survey respondents (83 %) reported bringing together diverse stakeholders as the major contributor for the Coalition's success. In addition, having a shared vision and goals was indicated by 69.2 percent of the respondents, exchanging of information and knowledge by 67.3 percent, meeting regularly by 59.6 percent, coordinated communication by 55.8 percent and collective synergy by 46.2 percent as contributors to the Coalition's success.

Figure 7. Factors contributing to the success of the SMC
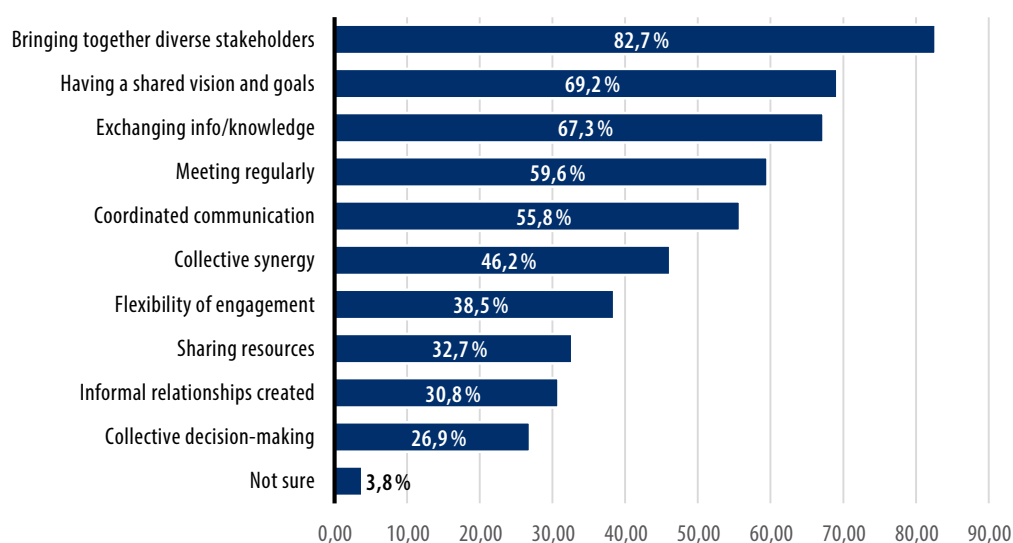
Consistent with this, studies have shown that diverse groups achieve better outcomes than uniform ones because they improve collective understanding and problem solving, among other benefits (Hong and Page 2004; Page 2007).

Framing strategy refers to how the Coalition actors publicly position the issue of school meals. Framing proved to be an important area of strength of the Coalition noted in the data. The Coalition employs a frame that emphasises multisectoral action covering not only the health and nutrition of school-aged children, but learning, agriculture, climate and the economy too. School meals transform to platforms for multisectoral action, human capital creation and resilience. It was noted from the qualitative data that the Coalition is alert to the changing narratives on the global stages and is flexible enough to adjust to these. The SMC generally follows an approach of consolidating and strengthening successes and remaining alert to the risks and stepping up efforts (e.g. declining finance from the financer – SFIs work in reaching out and supporting the member countries with the risk of being affected; adoption of climate urgency narrative, etc.). Previous studies on global networks have similarly documented how networks may differ in their capacities to discover frames that work and the significance of framing strategy in helping them attract attention and pool resources (Benford & Snow 2000; McInnes & Lee 2012; McInnes et al. 2012).

b)   External environmental factors

In addition to the internal features of the Coalition, external contexts also mattered in the emergence and success of the Coalition so far. An important factor in this regard is the outbreak of COVID-19. However tragic the pandemic in fact was for schoolchildren globally, school meals actually received increasing attention from leaders and legislators, as the pandemic weakened household livelihoods and increased hunger, and left an estimated 370 million children without their daily school meals, in addition to the 73 million children in the poorest countries already lacking access to school meals. School meals emerged as a feasible low-cost solution to a serious food access crisis. According to one informant, during the pandemic the absence of school meal access showed also the countries with already well-established school meal programmes how laborious and expensive any alternative is, strengthening the commitment on a country level, and preparing for advocacy globally.

Actors outside the Coalition represent potential allies and opponents. There are groups whose interests align with the Coalition's goals and are invited to the Coalition itself (e.g., Education Commission, GPE), hence facilitating meeting the Coalition's objective. It should, however, be noted that the Coalition is not without opponents. As one informant indicated, "the major resistance is not from the government, but from part of the research community". It was further indicated that such resistance from part of the

research community (e.g., first 1 000 days vs. 8 000 days debate) has fuelled more rigorous knowledge generation on issues of school meals which has the potential to further facilitate coalition mobilisation.

The increasing political will and the domestic financing being made by governments (WFP, 2022) were crucial in recovering from the pandemic and achieving the first objective of the Coalition (restoring the pre-pandemic situation).

c) Issue characteristics (severity, tractability, and affected group)

The issue characteristics (which specifically refers to severity, tractability and the nature of the affected group) is also an important aspect that has played a key role in galvanising the Coalition's momentum. In relation to the severity of the issue, with the outbreak of the pandemic in particular, it was well understood how the absence of school meals provision may lead to a range of development evils including hunger, poverty, morbidity and socio-economic disruption. Interviewees mentioned that this situation has hugely contributed to the growing political commitment to school feeding around the world.

In relation to the issue of the problem's tractability, individuals and organisations are more likely to act on problems perceived to be soluble (Stone 1989). In this regard, as one respondent noted, school feeding is already well tested in different kinds of societies (e.g. Finland, India, Brazil) and has a well-documented success story with well committed governments to share their experiences and collaborate to move the agenda forward (e.g. Finland). In addition, the school meals agenda is an issue with a clear, simple and recognisable target everywhere in the world. School meals can be measured and achievements in progress can be quick, and they are rather easily monitored. It is not framed in a polarised political landscape yet it is a politically achievable goal.

The literature on global networks argues that the nature of the affected group also matters. Dealing with issues related to groups understood not to be responsible for acquiring the condition are more likely to inspire network mobilisation (Stone 1989; Schneider & Ingram 1993). In this regard, the primary target group of school meals, i.e. schoolchildren, easily inspires sympathy, making the issue of school meals evoke feelings, mainly positive and even nostalgic. It can be embraced by very different societies, political systems and state structures. Hence, notwithstanding the variation that may exist in areas of emphasis, the issue of school meals was generally viewed positively across countries throughout the political and economic spectrum. There are serious risks in the use of the imagery of the suffering child (Kaskinen & Ranta 2023), but here an overly sentimental approach was avoided by the foregrounding of government action.

The school meal has multiple positive spin-off effects across society and so allies, rather than competitors, can be found and engaged with. Actors as far apart as women's cooperatives and entrepreneurial advocates, education experts to the fertiliser industry, to paediatric academics, can find a role in the Coalition. Win-win solutions can be clearly demonstrated. Needs hierarchies and competition of priorities can be avoided. School meal access is not distributed along the traditional North-South or donor-recipient axis, but has a more diverse dynamic, thus easing some of the usual tensions and resistance. School meal provision can include diverse actors and models, from private to state only, but it remains a clear topic for all. Hence, going beyond the objectives, the issue of school meals has served as a bridge builder at a time when bridge building topics are needed. Thus, the SMC can serve as a showcase for a new generation of multilateralism-connecting different sectors by focusing them on one policy priority with multiple impacts, and documented achieved goals.

3.3 Proposed process description to track and document the SMC's results

As mentioned before, documentation of results specific to the Coalition is difficult and perhaps ill-advised, considering that the Coalition ideally is a steppingstone for national achievements, and achievements need to be celebrated at home. As any investment of time and funds, however, needs to be monitored, the SMC will need some, perhaps more internal, instruments for tracking results. This of course also helps to assess the direction taken and to recognise the need to pivot. Our suggestions are drawn from the strengths and gaps noted in relation to tracking and documenting results of the Coalition, and are only tentative.

1. Number of Member States is a clear record of success and progress.

   - Further, the number of ministries within those countries, with active participation in the SMC, is also a helpful indicator of interest and relevance. For example, in some countries currently only the ministry dealing with global development may be involved, and not the ministry of education or health in the country, making the effort only outwardly, as is the case with Norway. Larger coverage within a country in a multisectoral initiative is needed to avoid siloing, and also to achieve the goal of not following the usual North-South or donor-recipient logic. There is a large variety of countries that can strengthen their school meal provision.

2. The recording of government commitments and their nature is an important activity on the Coalition's Secretariat level. The monitoring of how commitments translate to policies, plans and implementation is a country level action, but the SMC needs to collect such documentation and keep the records, preferably transparently on a website so that other countries can follow and, in the best case, mentor the process.

   • Currently, there seems to be an inadequate system of tracking progress made in the member countries. Many countries have not issued their national commitments yet, despite progress being made on various fronts (see country case study Ethiopia below]. In such situations, although it is encouraging that positive changes are taking place in these countries, such progress does not tend to be identified well as a contribution of the Coalition due to the weak links across local-national-global nodes.

3. The number of SMC-specific meetings and the number of respondents and presentations need to be recorded so that the relevance of their content and work mode can be monitored and necessary adjustments can be put in place in case of declining or narrowing participation.

   • Presentations showcasing country level success on an international platform is not only a peer learning opportunity but can also act as a major internal motivator and a way of institutionalising and consolidating a pre-existing policy or practice within a country, assisting further implementation.

4. The number of consultations between countries and the secretariat, or in peer-to peer modality, need to be tracked.

5. The number of downloads of different materials is a good indicator of high quality materials, low-threshold access and global awareness about the SMC

6. Each Initiative should track the situation of its respective fields in terms of influence of the SMC. However, the full recording and research on school meal provision for children globally is to be the task of the Research Consortium. This is of course the main impact and aim of the Coalition, not the Coalition's survival itself.

4   Conclusions and implications

The review has shown that a series of events have contributed to the emergence of the Coalition and its subsequent functioning. Among these, two important publications issued in 2020 by the WFP contributed to laying the foundations for the need to adopt a broader understanding of school meals and the approaches to be followed to end child hunger and poverty. The assessment confirmed that the first ministerial-level meeting of the Task Force was organised by Finland in Helsinki on 18 October 2022 and the first Global Ministerial Meeting for all members of the Coalition will be hosted by France and will take place in October 2023, in addition to the different regular meetings of the Coalition after its launch. Moreover, the Coalition is currently developing a global school meals database and has positioned school meals and school health and nutrition in important high-level discussions through its participation in several global initiatives and several regional high-level meetings. The recent inclusion of school meals among the key indicators of the SDG4 framework is also among the key success indicators that facilitates the legitimacy of the agenda in global development discourse and actions.

The assessment also indicated the Coalition's success as demonstrated by the growing momentum among governments and partners, with 80 countries from the global North and South and 90 partners signed on to the Coalition goals and objectives in less than two years. About 20 member countries have formally submitted bold and ambitious national commitments to the Coalition. Moreover, the countries' strong policy commitment to scaling up the reach and to improve the quality of national school meals programmes through various interventions can be taken as a major success of the Coalition. The study has also shown that increased information sharing and increased advocacy by the Coalition contributed to member countries' engagement in school meals programmes.

The study indicated that three important factors have contributed to the success of the Coalition in terms of its establishment achievements so far. These factors are: features of the Coalition and the actors it is comprised of, the policy environments, and the particular characteristics of the issue it addresses. The result of the survey also confirmed bringing together diverse stakeholders, with a shared vision and goals, exchanging information and knowledge, regular meetings and coordinated communication were the major contributors towards the Coalition's success.

A number of the most important lessons can be drawn from closer scrutiny of the process leading to the formation and development of the SMC for how to successfully initiate and ensure the effectiveness of global thematic multilateral networks. First, a key group of high-level political actors, primarily from countries that have proved that the thematic problem of concern is tractable and shown strong commitment, both currently and historically, are needed to start and drive the process. These leaders need to understand the crucial role they play in defining the issue in a way that resonates with a broad array of potentially interested countries/partners, in bringing them together and, once linked, in guiding them towards advancing the common agenda of achieving the shared goal. However, it also seems clear that behind these high-level figures is a strong institutional support that involves experienced government officials, diplomats and experts on multiple levels of the public sector.

Second, adopting a minimalistic and flexible approach in the network's governance structure with a strong, even if small, Secretariat office is crucial. This helps to smoothly run the network with limited organisational resource requirements and continuously identify and bring on board to the network committed and strategic actors. The key role that the presence of a strong and active Task Force plays in the crystallisation of global networks and carry on the momentum cannot be overemphasised. Furthermore, adopting the clear principle of the Coalition with clearly identified goals and the affected groups and well-articulated spin-off effects in a way that asserts the multisectoral nature of the thematic item played a key role in generating interest among various actors and avoiding negative competition.

Third, the study also reveals the significance of the composition of the network in determining its success. The Coalition adopts a multistakeholder approach instead of moving the issue through a single entity; however, with a greater focus on country-led action. This government-led and partner-supported approach enhanced governments' ownership of the issue with special recognition of actions required by all stakeholders, including international organisations, academia, civil society and the private sector. It is also worthwhile noting the SMC's focus on creating a platform for advocacy, support and peer learning between countries/governments, rather than prioritising the issue of funding provision that helped avoid the unrealistic donor-recipient dynamics that could have negatively impacted on the Coalition.

Fourth, the experience of the SMC indicates that a solid research evidence base is needed to motivate and support the actors, and convince the hesitant. Highly regarded and the most reliable research institutions should be engaged. The evidence base is most useful when it covers a wide range of topics, facilitating dynamic framing of the issue, establishing multistakeholder interest, and showcasing the spiral of positive impact of the theme under consideration. Ensuring efficient communication and access to the research is crucial in motivating further action.

5 Recommendations

The review process has attempted to collate important areas of improvements from the data that was gathered through the survey, in-depth interviews and document review. As the data is highly positive about the success and impact of the SMC, and the Coalition is still in its early years, our main recommendation is to continue in the same way, especially with the already existing awareness of rapid changes in the global context and among key actors. A coalition of this kind needs its key drivers on both the institutional and individual levels, however much the emphasis is on governments. In view of this, the following overall recommendation and specific recommendations are suggested.

Overall recommendation:

- The SMC is currently doing a commendable job of mobilising and engaging UN Member States and non-state actors. The Coalition is encouraged to intensify its effort to improve the quality of school meals by promoting healthy and nutritious meals for all school meal recipients, and to improve the integration of local food producers in strengthening the school meals systems, and thus local economic growth. In order to be able to consolidate and build on the achievements so far, the SMC should continue to raise the issue of the sustainability of school meals programmes and ensure the continuity of the work of the Coalition.

Specific Recommendations:

1. Continue the regional approach that is currently adopted by the Coalition to facilitate greater action on the peer-to-peer learning initiative and strengthen the engagement of both ministerial-level and technical-level officials in these processes. Enhance strategic partnerships at the regional level and build on regional events that are taking place in 2023 to embed the School Meals Coalition into regional structures.

2. The work on the documentation of school feeding programmes, which is being led by the Research Consortium on School Health and Nutrition and is currently underway, comparing different countries in terms of key aspects (targets, source of funding, what does funding include/cover, key partners/sectors supporting the programmes, manager/implementer the programme, etc.) requires a dissemination strategy to help countries use good practices and examples to improve the implementation of school meals in their respective countries. Reference material will be available on relevant websites. Countries can search for relevant information by topics, context, classification, type of modality, etc.

3. The SMC should enhance its ability to measure achievements and develop a system to track the commitments of governments and monitor progress. This could be available on the SMC website, and governments would be invited to share progress, but this would not be mandatory for governments or imply reporting obligations to the School Meals Coalition. This system would also support the knowledge management of the SMC Secretariat.

4. Finalise guidance for the involvement of interested private sector stakeholders in the School Meals Coalition.

5. Since school meals can be an important platform for climate action, continue to promote climate smart and Food Systems dialogues within the Coalition. Develop a conceptual framework for Food Systems and school meals to further inform action.

6. Continue the development of the School Health and Nutrition Database of the Data and Monitoring Initiative. This will ensure that there is a single source for storing, accessing and analysing official, reliable and trusted data for decision making.

7. Develop a multiyear leadership engagement plan to involve new leaders in the School Meals Coalition.

8. Ensure Member State participation in stakeholder meetings to provide opportunities for more interaction between stakeholders and governments.

9. Continue to expand the Sustainable Financing Initiative to advance the opportunities for financial support for the implementation of school feeding programmes in countries exposed to food crises to cover the food and nutritional needs of children along with other aspects of school health and nutrition programmes. Financial support can take the form of sustainably funded public or private business models, including those supporting local value chains.

10. Gender equality and women's empowerment should be explicitly integrated in the Coalition's goals and messaging.

11. Youth engagement on the issue of school meals should be further enhanced, building on good examples already in operation, like the Early Career Researcher & Young Scientist Community of Practice of the Research Consortium on School Health and Nutrition.

12. Continue to prioritise credible and robust knowledge generation on school meals through the Research Consortium on School Health and Nutrition in line with the broader framing of the issue (food systems, social protection, gender equality, peace and security, climate change, etc.) and its multidimensional impact. This requires data generation on schoolchildren, school staff (such as teachers), families and beneficiaries (such as women working in kitchens and local agriculture), among others. The views of schoolchildren, which are unfortunately often not given due emphasis in research, should be given greater attention.

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7   Annexes

7.1   Country case studies

7.1.1   Ethiopia

General overview of the school meals programmes at the country level

In Ethiopia, a World Food Programme (WFP) sponsored school feeding programme (SFP) was started as a pilot project in 1994 in war-affected zones in the Tigray Region, targeting 25,000 children in 40 schools. Later, SFPs were initiated in the chronically food insecure districts of Afar, Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, Somali and Tigray regions with a particular focus on districts with lower enrolment and higher gender disparity. In 2004, the programme reached 650,000 children in 1,200 schools. Then, the programme expanded to other food insecure and vulnerable areas in Ethiopia, mainly in pastoralist areas and chronically food insecure highland district to attract children to school (Frolich & Haile, 2019). The concept of homegrown school feeding was first introduced in the school year 2012–13 in 37 pilot schools in SNNPR (WFP, 2017). With nearly 30 years of experience, the Ethiopian school feeding programme is increasing its scope and strategic focus, building on a pilot project that links school feeding with local agricultural production. Increasingly, various bodies of the federal and regional bureaucracies, city administrations and communities are recognising the importance of establishing a universal and sustainable school feeding programme (WFP, 2022). For example, Addis Ababa City Administration provides free meals and school materials to over 300,000 students in the capital. Addis Ababa's School Feeding Programme ranked top in the Sustainable Diet and Nutrition category, beating 133 cities around the world, and won the 2022 Milano Pact Award for its student feeding programme.

Policy and Strategy Framework of School Feeding in Ethiopia

As part of its national development agenda, Ethiopia has been implementing different strategies and programmes to ensure food and nutrition security. Efforts were made to implement strategies and programmes, such as the Food and Nutrition Policy, National Food and Nutrition Strategy, National School Health and Nutrition Strategy, the Seqota Declaration, School Feeding Policy and Implementation Strategy and the Productive Safety Net Programme through multisectoral nutrition coordination and integration.

1.   Food and Nutrition Policy, November 2018

The Ethiopian Government formulated the Food and Nutrition Policy (FNP), which was endorsed by the council of ministers in November 2018. The goal of the FNP is to enable the achievement of an optimal nutritional status at all stages of life and bring the conditions to a level that is consistent with good health, quality of life and productivity. The FNP in Ethiopia identifies seven priority intervention areas as policy directions:

- Ensuring availability, accessibility and utilisation of diversified, safe and nutritious food

- Ensure the safety and quality of foods, from farm to table

- Improving post-harvest management of agricultural food products

- Ensuring optimum nutrition at all stages of life

- Creating a system for an effective food and nutrition emergency response

- Effective nutrition communication

- Creating effective food and nutrition governance.

2.   National Food and Nutrition Strategy (December 2019)

The context of this strategy is that Ethiopia faces a significant problem of malnutrition due to environmental, social, political, economic and culture-related problems. Inadequate productivity, postharvest loss, poor food safety and quality, poor caring practices and hygiene and health problems are some of the major drivers of food and nutrition insecurity. The problem of food and nutrition insecurity is further compounded by cultural beliefs, food taboos and traditional cooking and feeding practices which tend to discourage women and children from consuming nutritious foods. There have been frequent bouts of drought demanding an emergency response. As a result, over 53 percent of deaths among Ethiopian children can be attributed to malnutrition. Over 37 percent of children below 5 years of age in Ethiopia are stunted with compromised future potential for productivity. The Food and Nutrition Strategy is formulated on the basis of the Food and Nutrition Policy with the view to comprehensively address poverty eradication, Sustainable Development Goals and the vision of the country of achieving a middle income category by 2025.

The strategy addresses the linkages of the food and nutrition strategy with national and international declarations and commitments. It indicates that Ethiopia has subscribed to international conventions and instruments linked to food and nutrition security. Two of the strategic initiatives are devoted to the school feeding programme:

- Strategic Initiative 4: Promote the implementation of School Health and Nutrition programmes to improve the nutritional status of schoolchildren.

- Strategic Initiatives 7: Strengthen school health and nutrition services (deworming, school feeding, school WASH, nutrition education, nutrition screening and counselling).

3. National School Health and Nutrition Strategy (Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa Ethiopia, October 2012)

The document presents a national strategy for school health and nutrition (SHN) in Ethiopia. The strategy is based on extensive evidence collected during a nationwide situation analysis on the health, nutrition and education of schoolchildren conducted in 2008. The document indicates that schoolchildren are affected by health and nutrition-related problems that constrain their ability to thrive and benefit from education. The national SHN survey conducted in 2008 (MoE, 2008) showed that 23 percent of surveyed children were stunted and a similar percentage of them were also underweight.

The strategy indicates that, in the past, school-based health and nutrition programmes were fragmented and uncoordinated due to being implemented by different stakeholders, which led to inefficient and ineffective programme delivery as well as poor results. Most of the efforts were piecemeal and not planned on a sustainable basis. In order to ensure that the capacities of the education, health and water sectors, as well as communities and other stakeholders are harnessed, a well-designed SHN strategy is crucial. The SHN strategy was developed to fill the gaps and harmonise and strengthen existing SHN interventions. It intends to serve as a tool for the integration and reinforcement of broader SHN interventions. The main objectives of the strategy are to promote joint planning, design and implementation of sustainable and quality health and nutrition interventions across the education sector, and to strengthen coordination, linkage and partnership of SHN interventions by relevant ministries, communities and other stakeholders.

In the strategy document, one of the specific objectives was to ensure that mechanisms are put in place for ownership and sustainability of SHN programmes (such as school feeding programmes and other nutrition interventions, cooking demonstrations and school gardens), thereby increasing access and completion rates by reducing dropout

and absenteeism prevalent in chronically food insecure areas of the country. Schools are expected to promote good nutrition practices by integrating nutrition interventions, including school feeding programmes and micronutrient supplementation.

4.   The Seqota Declaration

In July 2015, the Government of Ethiopia announced its multiyear plan to end stunting in Ethiopia. Named after one of Ethiopia's most seriously affected areas, the Seqota Declaration commits to eradicating the underlying causes of chronic undernutrition and ending stunting among children under 2 years of age by 2030 by implementing a three-phased multisectoral plan. The declaration aims "to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture" in order to enhance development. Among other things, the declaration paid due attention to school feeding. It indicated that school feeding programmes contribute to alleviating short-term hunger but also help children concentrate better on their studies. Moreover, it enables them to gain increased cognition and better educational outcomes through addressing micronutrient deficiencies such as vitamin A, iodine and iron. Therefore, school feeding programmes are promoted with the intention of providing balanced meals to children in schools, especially those coming from poor and food insecure households. School demonstration gardens will serve as resources for school feeding programmes in addition to serving as a learning platform for students.

In order to improve the health and nutrition status of school children, the main interventions are:

- Scaling up home grown school feeding programmes.

- Expanding school health and nutrition programmes.

- Scaling up school WASH activities, emphasising the strengthening of linkages with health, agricultural, water and social protection programmes.

5.   National School Feeding Policy and Implementation Strategy (May 2021)

More recently, different ministries and development partners, among them the WFP, were involved in the creation of a policy framework and a strategy aiming towards the effective implementation of a school feeding programme in Ethiopia. The national school feeding policy and implementation strategy (available in Amharic), which set a vision of providing at least one meal a day to all pre-primary school children by 2030, is based on

four pillars: at least one safe and nutritious in-school meal mainly from local purchases, strong institutional arrangements, sustainable and stable financial sources and robust coordination mechanisms.

Regarding the structure of the school feeding programme, in Ethiopia, the Ministry of Education is responsible for designing policies, strategies, manuals, standards and directives related to school feeding. Furthermore the ministry provides capacity building training for the stakeholders, and it is the ministry's responsibility to monitor and evaluate the programme. The School Meal Coordinator at the ministry said the following: *We want the school feeding programme to be standardised and uniform at all levels through the manuals and strategies developed at federal level and disseminated to regions. However, we cannot force regions. The structure of the school feeding programmes varies across regions. For example, the programme was led by a school feeding agency in Addis Ababa, by a committee (Busa Gonofa) in Oromia region and through focal persons in other regions. At the school level, the programme is run by a committee in all regions.*"

Thus, even though school feeding is regarded as an important national programme with an enormous contribution for education and it is seen as requiring a strong structure, the programme still lacks a strong structure. The ministry is discussing the issue with regional administrations.

The interview conducted with the School Meal Coordinator at the Ministry of Education indicates that there are three major stakeholders regarding the school feeding programme in Ethiopia.

(i) **Government**: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health (responsible for food hygiene, including safety of the cooked food, the general health of the students like deworming and vaccination of cervical cancer); Ministry of Agriculture (coordinates unions to supply food materials with reasonable prices and support the programme in school gardening); and Water & Energy Ministry (make water accessible to schools which have School meals programmes).

(ii) **Non-Government:** WFP (provides operational and financial support, provides meals; provide capacity building and system strengthening training to stakeholders), Save the Children and Global Fund, GPE (Global Partnership for Education), ECW (Education Cannot Wait) and local NGOs participating in the programme.

(iii) **Local Community members and Individuals:** business sector is involved in school feeding, e.g. Capital Cement provides meals for 1000 students and around Dukem, Eastern Industrial Park. Especially in Oromia, the local community members are assisting the programme enormously through in kind support, such as the provision of different cereals and domestic chores like cooking, collecting wood and water.

Ethiopia's SMC membership

According to the respondent from the Ministry of Education, Ethiopia is a member country of the Coalition and joined the global SMC in 2021. He said: "*We participate in the conferences and experience sharing programmes organised by the Coalition. For example, I participated in a conference organised in Benin last year, in 2022. There are documents shared through the Coalition's website and sent to our email address.*"

Ethiopia joined the SMC as school feeding is the policy direction of the government and as a result of the country's participation in global and local initiatives. Another study participant at the Ministry of Education said that although the country is a member of the Coalition, the contact with the international community and other member countries is not as such strong. He noted that the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance will take part in the global forum to be organised in France and hoped it will be an opportunity to strengthen Ethiopia's membership in the Coalition.

Impact of joining the SMC on the national school meals programmes

As a result of SMC membership, Ethiopia was selected as a sample country for research by the Research Consortium led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine on school feeding value for money. The respondent said that the results of the study will be informative and will help the country revise its school feeding policy and strategies for better intervention and scaling up. According to the respondent, different information is shared by the Coalition, such as monthly newsletters and experiences of different countries (videos). He added that the Coalition is relevant in enabling member countries to learn from each other on how a given country effectively implemented the programme and lessons for other countries.

A prior interest in school feeding is the foundation, while the SMC provides support: "*We have been working on quality education for years and we cannot achieve educational objectives without school feeding. Hence SMC membership enables the country [Ethiopia] to share experiences and learn from other member countries for improving the programme and achieving the 2030 target.*"

He also reported that: "*As we started the programme and developed the policy framework recently, the country's membership supports us in improving the programme and it is a capacity. We are considering and taking lessons from other member countries and implementing the programme.*"

Challenges

According to the interviewees from the Ministry of Education, the major challenge in the implementation of school feeding is the scarcity of resources and budget shortages for the school feeding programme in Ethiopia. The second challenge is food price/inflation, which highly affects the budget for the programme. The security issue in the country also affects the transportation of food from the source to schools. The lack of a focal person for the Coalition and the weak engagement of higher officials in the Coalition from Ethiopia's side is another challenge. As a result, it is the WFP which serves as a link between the SMC and the country.

Recommendations

- The respondents recommend the continuation of the annual conferences and technical support, training and capacity building for member countries by the Coalition. Directing and guiding donors to support resource limited countries.

- Ethiopia's engagement with the SMC should be strengthened and a structure should be created for the Coalition, including the assignment of a focal person and a unit at the ministry for sharing information.

7.1.2   Rwanda

Brief History of the School Feeding Programme in Rwanda

The World Food Programme (WFP) started the school feeding programme (SFP) in Rwanda in 2001. In 2005, the Rwanda SFP was targeted to 12 drought-prone, food-insecure districts. The attendance rate at WFP-assisted schools increased from 73 percent to 95 percent in 2006 (Lamberts, 2009). From 2008 to 2012, the WFP extended its programme by targeting 290,000 students in 300 schools. Starting in 2010, the WFP also provided a monthly take-home ration of vegetable oil for host families of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC).

In 2019, the Government of Rwanda introduced a National School Feeding Policy and strategy that formed the basis for the National School Feeding Programme (NSFP). A budget to implement the programme was approved in 2020, and the NSFP began rolling out to 3.3 million students in October 2021. The policy calls for comprehensive, universal pre-school, primary school and secondary school coverage, with a focus on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition, plus unconventional procurement for the local purchase of fresh and nutritious foods to enhance nutrition, dietary diversity and economic development for rural smallholder farmers through a link to the reliable NSFP market for local produce.

The National School Feeding (NSF) Technical Working Group (TWG) was established in late 2019 to coordinate school feeding stakeholders and investments at high level and align the programme with the long-term government strategy. The TWG meets quarterly. The National School Feeding Steering Committee (NSFC) brings together ministries, government institutions and development partners to enhance multisectoral governance and institutional coordination arrangements and enforce the shared responsibility of all stakeholders. The main purpose of the NSFC is to provide strategic guidance for the development and implementation of national school feeding interventions in the country. The NSFC is made up of 16 government ministries and institutions and six development partners, chaired by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and co-chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI) and World Food Programme (WFP).

The National School Feeding Policy provided recommendations in six key areas: (1) scaling up the coverage of existing programmes; (2) ensuring that programmes are health and nutrition-sensitive; (3) promoting school gardening and farming; (4) securing sustainable finance for school feeding programmes; (5) linking market access for local farmers to the school feeding programme; and (6) partnerships, multisectoral coordination, collaboration and shared responsibility in the management of programmes. Other government policies relevant to the programme are the national Food and Nutrition Policy (2013–2018), which focuses on eliminating chronic malnutrition, and the School Health and Nutrition Policy (2014) that declares that all schoolchildren must study in a healthy environment in child-friendly schools.

In Rwanda, the Ministry of Education is responsible for overall coordination, policy formulation and strategic guidance. President Kagame of Rwanda has committed to scaling up the national school meals programme from 640,000 children to 3.3 million children. Moreover, the School Feeding Unit was created within the Ministry of Education for proper implementation of school feeding scaling up. At the district level, the school feeding programme is managed and implemented by local authorities. The school feeding indicators are integrated into the School Data Management System, and information regarding each student is available in the system.

School Meals Coalition (SMC)

Rwanda joined the global School Meals Coalition (SMC) in June 2021 and is one of the Task Force members. The respondent reported that joining the Coalition was a national decision, and it was seen as good for the country to join the global movement to learn from one another. Rwanda not only joined the Coalition but also drafted and signed a national commitment, in which the country specific items are detailed. According to this, Rwanda is committed to:

- Achieve universal coverage of school feeding for basic education. To review and update the National Comprehensive School Feeding Policy and strategy on a regular basis, to ensure it is relevant and inclusive.

- Increase the budget from USD 33 million to USD 44 million and the coverage from 660,000 to 3.8 million students.

- Establish, build capacity and sustain school feeding coordination structures and stakeholders at the national and decentralised levels to maximise the impact of school feeding programmes on the local market through the development of the local school feeding commodity supply chain and market linkages in close collaboration with stakeholders in the agriculture sector.

- Sustain the annual budget allocated to the national feeding programme.

- Participate in peer-to-peer exchange and learning activities with other countries and global school feeding stakeholders for impactful, nutritious and sustainable school feeding programmes (study visits, conferences, case studies, technical assistance).

- Support and build connections between national academic institutions and the school feeding research consortium, government and other relevant initiatives related to school feeding research and learning.

Impact of joining the SMC on the national school meals programmes

Interestingly, regarding the impact of joining the SMC on the national school meals programme in Rwanda, the respondent mentioned that, as such, there has been no impact. He noted that the country's initiative is very bold; the leadership of the country and the commitment is the major contributor for the success of the programme. He added that the success of the feeding programme is national, and the system is strong enough. However, he reported the country is still learning from the Coalition and participating in

peer-to-peer exchange and learning activities. The information shared by the Coalition through different platforms and conferences organised by the Coalition are helpful in advancing and sustaining the national school meal programme.

Challenges

A global rise in food prices is a major challenge.

Recommendations

- Creating a sub-regional network (Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan). Accordingly, Rwanda has taken the responsibility to organise a conference in June 2023 and create the sub-regional network this June. They see that it as better to start from a sub-region and go for Africa and then globally.

- Resource mobilisation for the sustainability of school meal programmes.

- Improving the efficiency of the national system for school meal programmes.

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