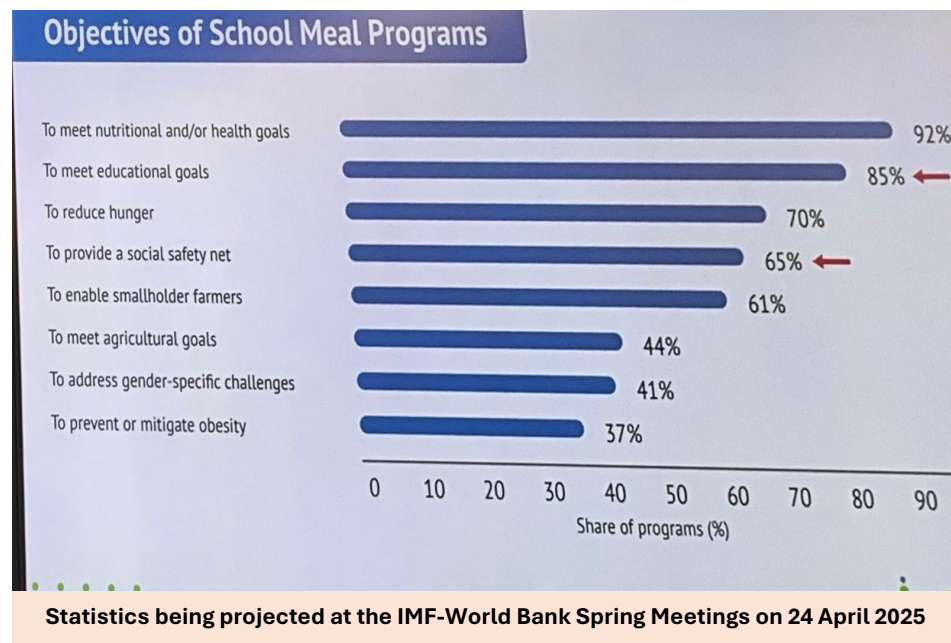


## CSBAG at the 2025 World Bank/IMF Spring Meetings: Innovative financing for school feeding



**The session held under the theme 'School Meals Programs: A Proven, Efficient, and Resilient Safety Net' discussed innovative financing, cross-sector collaboration, and the scaling of successful models for achieving equity and impact in global school meal as a powerful tool to combat hunger, poverty, and disparities in education.**

School feeding programs currently reach approximately 400 million children worldwide, playing a critical role in promoting food security, improving educational outcomes, and boosting health. However, coverage remains uneven, with low-income countries experiencing

the most pronounced gaps. According to a 2024 global survey of schools, while governments contribute a significant share (43%) of school meal budgets, real investment per child is declining due to inflation and rising food prices.

"The aggregate budget allocated to school meals in 2022 was \$67.2 billion, with 43% coming from governments, but real investment per child is falling due to inflation. Innovative Financing Solutions for School Meals" by Dr. Lisa

The findings highlight an urgent need for innovative financing solutions and increased international support to expand and sustain school feeding programs. According to Heidi Kessler of the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, improving budget allocations and scaling up these programs is critical to addressing the existing gaps.

Dr. Lisa introduced the Sustainable Finance Initiative and its role in helping countries expand school meals by thinking through financing strate. According to her, the initiative projects that increasing school meals coverage to 60% could reach an additional 260 million children by 2030, requiring \$3.6 billion.

Effective financing models, including the African Development Bank's \$100 million School Age Hunger Fund and the World Bank's debt-for-development swaps, were praised for their impact.

To address these challenges, the recommendations discussed in this session were both ambitious and actionable. First, there is a clear call to explore new funding mechanisms such as sin taxes and taxes on natural resources. Sin taxes, often levied on products like tobacco, alcohol, or sugary drinks, can generate significant revenue while simultaneously discouraging unhealthy consumption.

Taxes on natural resources, including extractive industries, offer another avenue for mobilizing domestic funds. These strategies are particularly relevant for governments seeking sustainable ways to finance school meal programs without overburdening traditional funding sources.

Debt swaps and blended finance are recommended as potential solutions. Debt-for-development swaps can help countries reduce external debt while investing in social programs like school feeding, alleviating fiscal pressure and directing resources to critical sectors. Blended finance, which combines concessional loans, grants, and private investment, offers a framework for scaling up school meals by leveraging diverse funding sources. These innovative models can be particularly beneficial for low-income countries facing significant financing challenges.

The meeting also emphasized the need for multilateral development banks (MDBs) to prioritize school meals within their portfolios. Encouraging MDBs to integrate school feeding into their broader educational and developmental strategies can unlock significant resources. Mechanisms such as the International Financing Facility for Education were cited as examples of how MDBs can amplify their impact through targeted investments in school meals.

Knowledge sharing and technical support are important for successfully implementing innovative financing strategies. Initiatives like the Sustainable Finance Initiative can provide vital guidance and best practices, empowering governments and stakeholders to adopt effective approaches tailored to their specific needs. Widespread dissemination of this information can help countries leverage innovative financing solutions for school feeding programs.

Scaling successful models is a key priority, with programs like Brazil's National School Feeding Program and the African Development Bank's co-financing initiatives serving as valuable examples. These models demonstrate the potential for school feeding programs to improve education, enhance nutrition, and foster economic development by integrating local farmers and supporting rural economies.

While progress has been made, addressing coverage gaps, particularly in low-income countries, requires bold and coordinated efforts. By adopting innovative financing mechanisms and leveraging successful models, the global community can work towards universal access to school meals, ultimately feeding millions of children and driving sustainable development.