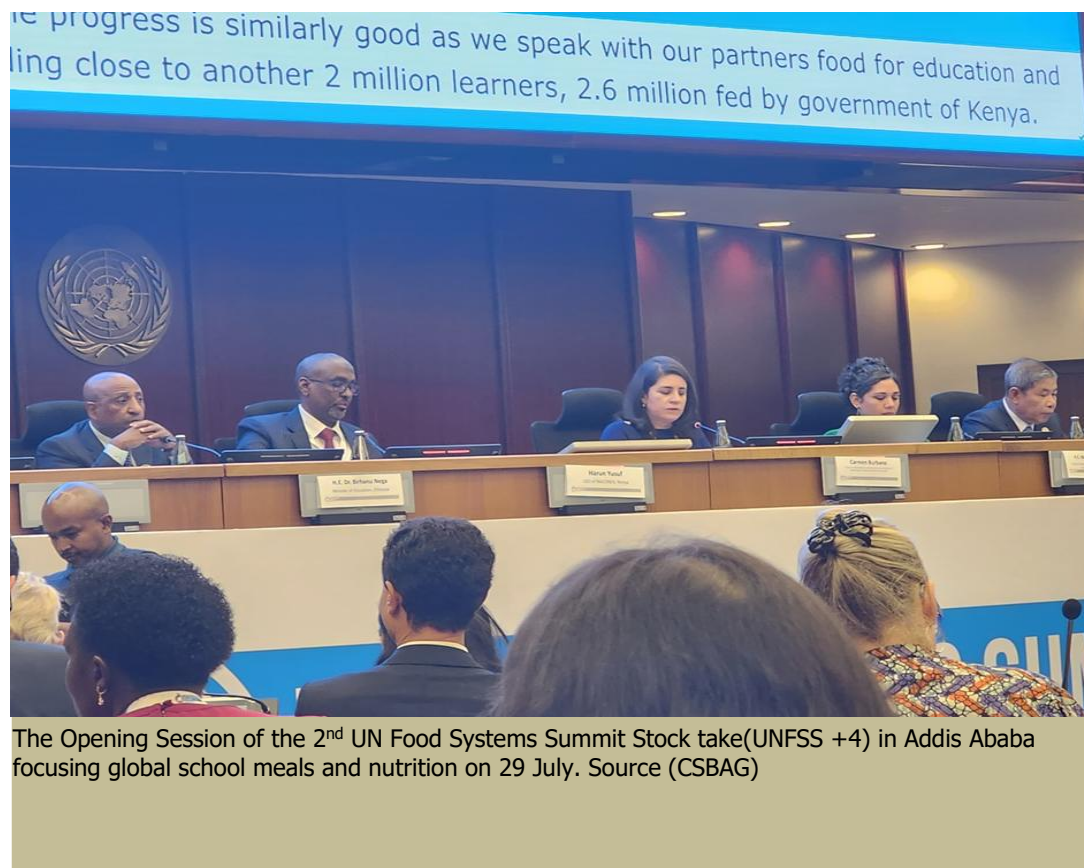


UNFSS+4 UPDATES: Scaling Global School Meals For Nutrition Equity



The Opening Session of the 2nd UN Food Systems Summit Stock take (UNFSS +4) in Addis Ababa focusing global school meals and nutrition on 29 July. Source (CSBAG)

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The 2025 UN Food Systems Summit Stock take (UNFSS+4), co-hosted by Ethiopia and Italy and held in Addis Ababa from 28–29 July, marked the second global follow-up to the landmark 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. Convened by the UN Secretary-General, the Stock take assessed country-level progress in transforming food systems to be more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable. Amid growing climate shocks, economic instability, and global food insecurity, UNFSS+4 brought together governments, civil society, and development partners to renew political commitment and accelerate collective action toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through food systems transformation.

On Day 2 of the UN Food Systems Summit +4 (UNFSS+4), CSBAG joined a landmark session focused on scaling global school meals as a pathway to nutrition equity and food systems transformation. Held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the session brought together leaders from over 100 governments, development partners, and multilateral agencies under the banner of the School Meals Coalition, one of the most dynamic global movements to emerge from the original 2021 Food Systems Summit. The event, organized under the School Meals Coalition, emphasized that school feeding is no longer seen as a stopgap or emergency measure. Instead, it is fast becoming a cornerstone of national development plans, serving not only as a social safety net but also as critical infrastructure for improving child welfare, creating jobs, supporting local agriculture, and building climate resilience.

Launched in 2021 with just 15 countries, the School Meals Coalition has grown rapidly to 109 member states and 140 partners. The Coalition reflects a shift toward long-term, government-led investment in human capital with Africa leading the charge. Ethiopia's case stood out. In just four years, the country scaled its school feeding program from 1.6 million children in 2021 to 7.5 million in 2025. Over the same period, public funding increased from \$11.7 million to \$127 million. The program is financed through a unique model: 56% by communities, 37% by the government, and just 7% by donors.

This expansion is the result of a deliberate policy shift. What began as a response to drought and food insecurity has evolved into a mainstream, rights-based development program. Ethiopia now aims to universalize school feeding from pre-primary to middle school by 2030. In cities like Addis Ababa, the initiative is linked directly to urban food systems, with local procurement at the core, turning schools into markets for smallholder producers and hubs for nutritional support. Kenya also shared its experience. The country began school feeding in the 1980s and took full ownership of the program in 2018.

Today, it feeds 2.6 million children, with plans to scale up to 10 million by 2030. President William Ruto's manifesto targets 8 million by 2027. Kenya was the first country to establish a national school meals coalition, led by the Ministry of Education and supported by partners including WFP, FAO, IFAD, the World Bank, and Food for Education.

The Kenyan model prioritizes food system transformation. Its three-pillar approach promotes local supply chains that directly link farmers to schools, menus based on nutritious and drought-resistant crops, and the rollout of clean cooking solutions in school kitchens. These steps align with national climate goals and open doors to future climate finance. Latin America and Asia brought strong regional perspectives. Guatemala has grown its school meals budget from \$73 million in 2015 to \$427 million in 2025. The program is funded through a national peace tax and domestic resources and enshrined in law, ensuring policy continuity across political transitions and integrating school meals into education and food systems planning.

Cambodia has taken bold steps as well. Meals distributed annually increased from 7 million in 2020 to 28 million in 2025, with a target of 56 million by 2028. Public investment has quadrupled. In 2024, Cambodia adopted a National School Feeding Policy covering 2024–2035, positioning school meals as a "game changer" in its food systems roadmap. The strategy cuts across sectors, including education, health, agriculture, WASH, and social protection, and addresses key implementation gaps such as supply chains, infrastructure, and coordination.

The session also highlighted four key Coalition initiatives driving progress: a global research consortium hosted by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine; a sustainable financing platform helping ministries access long-term funding options; the Cities Feeding the Future initiative, which now connects over 100 mayors; and a WFP-led data and monitoring hub tracking global school feeding trends.

Closing the session, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed emphasized that school meals are "a lever for inclusion, equity, and resilience." She laid out four global priorities: expanding coverage to reach an additional 150 million children by 2030; transforming food systems through procurement and clean energy; integrating school meals into national climate strategies ahead of COP30 in Brazil; and closing the financing gap through innovative solutions such as debt swaps, natural resource revenues, and health taxes.

This UNFSS+4 session sent a clear message: school feeding is no longer optional. It is one of the most effective, scalable, and nationally owned tools for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and governments are leading the way.

Advocacy Action Points for CSBAG: Lessons from UNFSS+4

- 1. Advocate for a national school feeding policy framework.** Push for the development of a government-led, multi-sectoral policy to define clear goals, responsibilities, and financing structures, drawing from Ethiopia's model.
- 2. Push for increased public financing for school meals.** Engage Parliament, the Ministry of Finance, and local governments to prioritize school feeding in national and district budgets, reducing dependency on external funding.
- 3. Mobilize community and district ownership.** Promote inclusive procurement systems that involve parents, school committees, and local producers to foster sustainability and accountability.
- 4. Strengthen transparency and monitoring.** Advocate for open data systems to track school meals implementation and inclusion in budget performance reviews.
- 5. Leverage regional platforms and peer learning.** Position Uganda to engage meaningfully with the School Meals Coalition, with active participation at the upcoming Brazil Summit and COP30.