



Joint civil society statement ahead of the 2nd Global Summit of the School Meals Coalition

Fortaleza, Brazil, September 2025

Introduction

We, members of the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Network for School Meals, reaffirm our collective commitment to ensuring that every child receives a healthy, nutritious, locally sourced school meal every school day by 2030. Our network spans the full spectrum of civil society, from organisations supporting single schools, to umbrella networks representing thousands of CSOs across the globe. Together, we embody the vastness, diversity, and collective strength of civil society working to transform school meal systems worldwide.

In 2023, we launched [a joint Call to Action](#) urging governments, donors, and partners to expand, enhance, and sustainably finance school meal programmes. Two years on, we present this joint statement to reaffirm our collective commitment, reflect on progress, outline what we need from governments to ensure the enjoyment of the right to adequate food for all children, deepen impact, and chart a path forward.

From commitment to impact: civil society's role in transforming school meals

A. Expansion & reach

CSOs are expanding their reach with direct implementation, proving that effective school meal delivery is possible at every level, from grassroots to global. The impact of direct implementation by CSOs working in various contexts throughout our network provides a powerful example of the impact and potential of school meals.

B. Strengthened government partnerships

CSOs are fully activated to support governments in their school meal commitments. Through MOUs, technical working groups, and shared multi-sectoral implementation frameworks, CSOs are co-designing policies, scaling solutions, and securing budgetary wins.

When governments listen, programmes thrive, and CSOs are the bridge.

C. Innovation & systems strengthening

CSOs are fueling school meals with innovation, infrastructure, and impact. From climate-smart agriculture to clean cooking technologies, they are pioneering solutions that enhance the nutritional quality, sustainability, and reach of school meals. CSOs also play a pivotal role in advocating for policies that ensure healthy school environments while also promoting access to fresh, minimally processed, and culturally appropriate food options in schools. Additionally, many organisations are strengthening systems, through training, digital monitoring, and community mobilization, to help ensure long-term success.

D. Bridging grassroots innovation with national policy & beyond

CSOs are transforming school meal programmes into holistic platforms for child development, community resilience, and economic inclusion. With deep local roots, CSOs are uniquely positioned to connect smallholder farmers, women entrepreneurs, and researchers to school feeding systems, bridging grassroots innovation with national policy and beyond. Their work integrates nutrition with agriculture, education, health, climate resilience and WASH, turning school meals into engines of human capacity development.

Core messages from civil society to governments on strengthening school meal programmes

1. Partner early, co-design often

CSOs are ready to co-create school meal policies and programmes that reflect community realities and are grounded in the fundamental right to food and health. Engaging CSOs early in policy development and technical working groups ensures inclusive design, local relevance, and long-term success.

2. Share responsibility across sectors

Feeding children is everyone's business. Governments, CSOs, private sector actors, and communities must work together to help ensure every child receives a nutritious meal at school. Shared accountability and joint implementation are key to sustainability. This responsibility extends beyond meal provision to enacting policies that support healthy school food environments and aligning public food procurement with nutrition and sustainability goals.

3. Use evidence to drive policy

CSOs offer data, research, and grassroots monitoring, and independent analysis free of conflict of interests to inform evidence-based decisions. Governments can strengthen school meal programmes by leveraging CSO networks, learning exchanges, and community feedback loops to improve quality and accountability.

4. Recognise CSOs as system builders

Civil society is not just a service provider, it is a strategic partner in building resilient, inclusive school meal systems. Governments should invest in joint training, advocacy, and long-term collaboration to embed CSO expertise into national frameworks. This includes establishing formal mechanisms for civil society participation in school meals governance, such as advisory councils, permanent multi-stakeholder platforms, and public accountability spaces.

5. Invest in community-led innovation

CSOs bring trusted relationships, local knowledge, and proven innovations, from culturally appropriate menus to climate-smart agriculture and clean cooking technologies. Governments can scale impact by funding and integrating CSO-led models into national systems.

6. Promote regulatory frameworks for healthy school food environments

To ensure comprehensive improvements in school meal programs, it is critical to adopt policies that remove the availability, marketing, and promotion of unhealthy food and beverages in and around schools. Ultra-processed food and beverage consumption is growing globally and is linked to increased malnutrition and non-communicable diseases. Schools are often saturated with unhealthy options. Therefore, in addition to providing healthy, nutritious meals, it is essential to reduce children's exposure and consumption of unhealthy products through evidence-based regulations to ensure healthy school environments.

Governments must also ensure that public food procurement is aligned with nutrition goals and should not procure unhealthy food and beverages. Establishing and enforcing nutrition-based criteria in public procurement policies is fundamental to building healthier food systems and ensuring children's right to adequate nutrition

Our commitment as CSOs

As CSOs, we are deeply committed to advancing school meal programmes that nourish children, strengthen communities, and build resilient systems. We bring decades of experience, trusted relationships, and proven models that reflect the realities of the communities we serve. Our work is rooted in evidence, driven by innovation, and guided by the belief that every child deserves a nutritious meal at school.

We pledge to:

- *Co-design solutions* with governments, aligning policies with grassroots realities and inclusive practices
- *Champion shared responsibility*, working alongside governments, the private sector, and communities to help ensure no child is left behind
- *Scale innovation* - from climate-smart agriculture to digital monitoring and beyond
- *Strengthen systems* through technical support, training, and long-term capacity building
- *Amplify community voices* and help ensure school meals reflect local cultures, needs, and aspirations
- *Promote intersectoral coordination* across education, health, agriculture, and social protection to ensure sustainable and impactful innovations

Conclusion: Call to action

Feeding children is everyone's business. Governments have the mandate, but CSOs have the proximity, creativity, and trust to make school meals work day after day, child by child. Together, we can build inclusive, sustainable, and evidence-driven programmes that reach every child, in every school, everywhere. Let's move forward co-designing policies, investing in community-led solutions, and treating child nutrition as a shared national priority.