




# A REVIEW OF ZAMBIA'S SCHOOL MEALS COMMITMENTS IMPLEMENTATION


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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Zambia faces significant challenges with hunger and malnutrition. The country has 32% of children stunted and 3% wasted, and widespread micronutrient deficiencies. To improve school enrolments, retention, learners' performance, child nutrition, and health, the government of the Republic of Zambia joined the global School Meals Coalition in 2022, a group of 109 countries committed to providing healthy and nutritious school meals. This move aims to strengthen Zambia's capacity to improve child health, nutrition, and learning outcomes.

During the School Meals Summit, Zambia committed to four key actions:

 Expanding the Home-Grown School Meals (HGSM) program

 Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks

 Implementing cross-sector coordination

 Investing in research and knowledge-sharing

The government expanded the school feeding program from **70 to 106** districts in 2025, benefiting **4,675,018** learners in **8,193** schools backed by a budget allocation **K534.4 million**.

The government has also developed a diversification plan that promotes localized menus supported by a local procurement strategy linking smallholder farmers to the programme. A food tracking system is being piloted to support accountability and evidence-based decision-making. Zambia has also emerged as a regional leader in knowledge-sharing through South-South cooperation.

However, the Country Progress Review Report also highlights some areas for improvement, such as funding gaps, the need to develop a robust monitoring and evaluation system that fully integrates smallholder farmers to operationalize a decentralized procurement system, and strengthening infrastructure. Furthermore, the report recommends the need to fully participate in coalition initiatives, such as the Technical Assistance Facility and Sustainable Financing.

While these achievements are substantial, the program's long-term sustainability remains a critical challenge. To ensure the continued provision of healthy, nutritious meals to 6.6 million learners in 116 districts in 2026, World Vision Zambia recommends that the government allocate at least K2,217,600,000. This is because it costs a minimum of K336 to feed a child annually.

## BACKGROUND AND ISSUE

Hunger and malnutrition pose continuous threats to the lives of vulnerable populations, impacting the well-being of millions of children, women and adolescents worldwide. The problem is particularly acute in least-developed countries, with countries in Asia and Africa, as well as conflict-affected nations, facing heightened vulnerabilities. Hunger is rising in Africa, where more than one in five people are affected.<sup>2</sup>

*The global challenge of malnutrition is profound: In 2024, 8.2% (about 673 million) people faced hunger.<sup>3</sup> 23.2% (about 148.1 million) children suffered stunted growth, with 75% of these children residing in conflict-affected countries; 45 million (6.8%) of the world's children experienced wasting; and 37 million (5.6%) grappled with issues relating to excessive weight.<sup>4</sup>*

*In Zambia, hunger and malnutrition affect millions of children. According to the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS 2024), 32% of children are stunted, while 3% are wasted. Micronutrient deficiencies are also widespread among children. Anaemia affected 28% children under five and 21% women of reproductive age.<sup>5</sup>*

*Meanwhile, about 9.31% adolescents aged 5-19 are undernourished.<sup>6</sup> Lack of healthy and nutritious meals can have a devastating impact on their growth and development.<sup>7</sup> In all regions affected by growing global food insecurity and hunger, an increasing number of children, especially girls, are put at risk of child marriage, child labour, and sexual violence.<sup>8</sup>*

More than 3.3 million children are exposed to the risk of child marriage due to hunger. In this post-pandemic era, a child who goes to bed hungry is 60% more likely to be married than their peers who do not experience hunger. Conflict and an increase in extreme weather events are also pushing our global nutrition and food security goals off track.<sup>9</sup> Hunger imperils children's futures. School meal programmes are pivotal, encouraging even the most disadvantaged families to send their children, especially girls, to school.

By ensuring children receive vital nutrition, these programmes empower them to thrive and excel academically.<sup>10</sup> In October 2023, on the sidelines of the first global summit of the School Meals Coalition, over 100 civil society organisations co-signed a robust call to action for equitable access to healthy school meals for all students.<sup>11</sup> The declaration came in response to a growing global hunger crisis, fuelled largely by conflict, inflation, and climate change. During the summit, the Zambian government committed to implement the following;

- Expand its Home-Grown School Meals (HGSM) programme by integrating nutrition and connecting it to local agriculture.
- Implementing cross-sector coordination (education, agriculture, health, social protection).
- Establishing robust M&E frameworks and accountability systems.
- Investing in research and knowledge-sharing through South-South cooperation<sup>12</sup>

This document highlights the myriad benefits of school meal programmes for children and adolescents, among them: alleviating hunger, increasing student enrolment – and retention, improving learning outcomes, strengthening household finances, protecting children from child labour and early marriage, stabilising communities, and many more benefits. The School Meals Programme is a powerful tool that contributes to multiple sustainable development goals;



Additionally, when associated with a series of interventions including WASH and other health-enhancing activities, school meal programmes can significantly improve health and nutrition outcomes for disadvantaged children.

<sup>2</sup> The 2025 SOFI Report

<sup>3</sup> The 2025 SOFI Report

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/m/the-state-of-food-security-and-nutrition-in-the-world-2023>

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF Zambia, 2025

<sup>6</sup> WHO, 2022

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dcp-3.org/resources/child-and-adolescent-health-and-development-optimising-education-outcomes>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/it-takes-world/end-child-marriage/breaking-chain-empowering-girls-and-communities-end>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.wvi.org/newsroom/coronavirus-health-crisis/33-million-children-risk-child-marriage-due-to-post-pandemic-hunger>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/GHR\\_sitrep12\\_01092023pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/GHR_sitrep12_01092023pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid;

<sup>12</sup> School Meals Coalition Commitments

<sup>13</sup> [School meals coalition.org](https://www.schoolmealscoalition.org)



# ZAMBIA'S PROGRESS ON SCHOOL MEALS COALITION COMMITMENTS

The Zambian government has made significant progress in implementing the four commitments made at the School Meals Coalition Summit.

## 1 Expansion of the Home-Grown School Meals (HGSM) programme by integrating nutrition and connecting it to local agriculture.

- » **Coverage:** The program's coverage has expanded substantially. As of mid-2024, it reached over 4.6 million children across 106 districts out of 6.6 million learners, compared to 2021 when the programme expanded to 70 districts benefitting 2,300,000 learners in 5,321 school countrywide.<sup>14</sup> The government plans to expand the program to all 116 districts by 2026.<sup>15</sup>
- » **Budget:** The government has progressively increased the budget for the program. The 2025 national budget allocated K534.4 million, a significant increase from K111.7 million in 2024 (which also saw a supplementary allocation of K392.2 million to respond to the drought). The Ministry of Education has already spent about K195.8 million on the programme in the first quarter of 2025. The programme currently benefits over 8,000 schools out of about 13,000 schools in the country.<sup>16</sup> However, the budget is not enough to provide the necessary healthy, nutritious meals to disadvantaged children and expand to other areas.
- » To integrate nutrition into the HGSM programme, the government has developed a diversification plan that promotes localized menus, supported by a local procurement strategy linking smallholder farmers to the programme.<sup>17</sup>

## 2 Implementing cross-sector coordination (education, agriculture, health, social protection).

The government has developed a HGSM strategy as a framework to guide multisectoral coordination at the district, provincial, and national levels including establishing School Health and Nutrition Directorate with dedicated staff responsible for overseeing effective programme implementation. The strategy is currently under review to address emerging issues, including those related to the programme's ongoing expansion.<sup>18</sup>

## 3 Robust M&E and Accountability Systems:

A Food Tracking System is being piloted to support accountability and evidence-based decision-making and over the next five years, the government plans to develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to track school health and nutrition indicators.<sup>19</sup>

## 4 Research and Knowledge-Sharing:

Zambia is actively positioning itself as a leader in school meal programs in the region. To support South-South and Triangular Cooperation, the government has facilitated learning exchanges, including a visit by a Libyan government delegation to observe the design and implementation of Zambia's Home-Grown School Meals programme. In 2023, the government participated in a knowledge management exercise on good practices, facilitated by the WFP Abidjan Centre of Excellence, followed by a 2024 study on Home-Grown School Meals best practices conducted by Columbia University. It has also engaged in regional forums on school meals, both sharing and learning best practices.<sup>20</sup>

# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The government has made some progress, but more needs to be done to improve the school feeding programme in the country. The highlights include;

### PROGRAMME EXPANSION



Programme has expanded from 70 to 106 districts and is currently reaching 4.6 million out of 6.6 million learners coupled with increased yearly government budgetary allocation to the HGSM programme since 2022.<sup>21</sup>

### DIVERSIFICATION



Development of a diversification plan that promotes localized menus supported by a local procurement strategy linking smallholder farmers to the programme.

### FOOD TRACKING SYSTEM



Food Tracking System being piloted to support accountability and evidence-based decision-making.

<sup>14</sup>Ministry of Education presentation, 2025

<sup>15</sup>Zambia Country Progress Report, 2025

<sup>16</sup>Lusaka times

<sup>17</sup>Ibid,

<sup>18</sup>Zambia Country Progress Review Report

<sup>19</sup>Ibid,

<sup>20</sup>Ibid,

<sup>21</sup>Ibid,

## CHALLENGES

Despite the significant progress, key challenges remain, particularly concerning program sustainability.

- **Funding Gaps:** The provided documents indicate that despite the increased budget, a substantial portion of eligible learners—approximately 30.30%—still lack access to the program due to funding constraints.
- **Budget Allocation:** While the education budget has increased in nominal terms and as a percentage of the total budget (reaching 15.4% in 2024), the specific allocation to the school feeding program, while growing, has not yet reached a level that can ensure universal coverage and quality.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Monitoring and evaluation system:** There is need to develop a robust monitoring and evaluation system further, fully integrate smallholder farmers to operationalize a decentralized procurement system, and strengthen infrastructure.
- **Partnerships and advocacy:** There is need to fully participate in Coalition initiatives such as the Technical Assistance Facility and the Sustainable Financing Initiative to enhance the quality and long-term sustainability of the programme.
- **2026 recommended School Feeding Budget:** To feed 6.6 million learners in 116 districts in 2026, the Government should consider allocating a minimum budget of K2,217,600,000 (Two Billion, Two Hundred and Seventeen million, Six Hundred Thousand Kwacha). This is because, annually for each child to receive a nutritious meal per year, it costs a minimum of approximately K336.

## CITATIONS AND RESOURCES

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3. *Child and adolescent health and development optimising education outcomes* accessed on <https://www.dcp-3.org/resources/child>
4. *Million children risk child marriage due to post pandemic hunger report* accessed on <https://www.wvi.org/newsroom/coronavirus-health-crisis/33>
5. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*, accessed on <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/state-food-security-and-nutrition-world-2025-addressing-high-food-price-inflation-food-security-and-nutrition-enaritrush>
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7. *UNICEF Zambia Report on child nutrition, 2025* accessed on <https://www.unicef.org/zambia/nutrition>
8. *WHO Statistics on Adolescent Nutrition, 2022*
9. *Zambia Country Progress Review Report 2025*, accessed on <https://schoolmealscoalition.org/member/zambia>
10. *Zambia Demographic and Health Survey, 2024* accessed on <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-pr159-preliminary-reports-key-indicators-reports.cfm>

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