

COMMEMORATION OF THE 8TH AFRICA DAY OF SCHOOL FEEDING (ADSF)

1ST MARCH 2023

DRAFT COMMUNIQUE

We, the Ministers, and high officials of African Union (AU) Member States, the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD), Regional Economic Commissions (RECs), together with our partners, the World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), African Early Childhood Network (AFECN), WFP Regional Center of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM), Nutrition International, as well as other distinguished cluster members and invitees, were hosted by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Kingdom of Morocco and met in person on the 1st March 2023 to discuss our commitment to advancing the homegrown school feeding agenda in Africa.

[Preambular paragraphs]

RECALLING AU Assembly decision 589 (XXVI) and the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Growth and Transformation in which Heads of State and Government of the African Union reiterated the importance of the wellbeing of school children as a key pre-condition to advance learning, education, and overall human capital development;

ACKNOWLEDGING that home-grown school feeding (HGSF) is a key intervention in the delivery of the African Union Continental Education Strategy (CESA 16 -25), the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), and the Africa Regional Nutrition Strategy (2016-2025), thereby contributing to the realisation of Agenda 2063 – “The Africa We Want”;

RECALLING the UN Summit on Transforming Education held in September 2022 in New York, USA which focused on thematic action tracks on: Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools; learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development; teachers, teaching and the teaching profession; digital learning and transformation and the financing of education; and the commitments on strengthening the implementation of comprehensive school feeding programs in the Declaration on Transforming Education in Africa by the AU Heads of States and Governments and partners.

INSPIRED by the 2023 African Union theme – Acceleration of AfCFTA Implementation, the 2023 ADSF is commemorated under the theme "Boosting Local Food Procurement Systems and Regional Value Chains: The role of AfCFTA for Sustained Home-grown School Feeding Programmes and Improved Learning"; and **ACKNOWLEDGING** the potential of the AfCFTA to contribute to establishing regional and sustainable food value chains in Africa, enabling investment and job creation, connected to Home Grown School Feeding Programs;

WELCOMING the Designation of 2024 by the 36th AU Assembly of the Heads of State and Governments as the Year of Education that will place a continental spotlight on development and implementation of effective, long-lasting, system-wide transformational strategies for education in Africa.

RECOGNISING the significant progress Member States have made in restoring school meal programmes to pre-pandemic levels, with the numbers of children reached now slightly exceeding pre-pandemic levels, with about 65,9 million children receiving school meals in 2022 from 65.4 million children in 2020;

INVITE more AU Member States to join the School Meals Coalition and **WELCOME** the country-specific commitments and efforts to operationalise the shared goals and objectives of the coalition into concrete national actions which have led to the restoration of pre-pandemic coverage levels in 2022;

COMMENDING the AU Member States' efforts, best practices and success stories on School Feeding Programs and their positive impacts on girls' and women's enrolment rates, training and resilience; as well how the "Home Grown School Feeding" has been used as a strategy for quality nutrition and retention of girls in schools¹;

UNDERLINING the importance of leveraging national surveys, needs-assessments, cross-benefit analyses across sectors for data and evidence on Home-Grown School Feeding, **COMMENDS** the Biennial Report 2021-2022, developed by the Commission in collaboration with Member States, WFP, AUDA-NEPAD, FAO, CERFAM, AFECN and other partners;

RECOGNISING that domestic budgets continue to represent the primary funding source for school meal programmes in Africa, with the share of domestic funding compared to international donor funding increasing from 82 percent in 2020 to 85 percent in 2022 across all income levels;

FURTHER RECOGNISING particularly that low-income countries have increased their domestic funding for school meals from approximately 34 percent in 2020 to 45 percent in 2022, **CONCERNED** that at the same time, there has been a reduction in much-needed international support;

STRESSING that coverage disparities in the continent remain between regions and income categories, with 55 percent of children covered by school meal programs in upper-middle-income countries but only 17 percent in low-income countries;

DEEPLY concerned about the complex set of unfolding crises and stressors, including the education crisis, food crisis and climate crisis, which are not only threatening the nutrition, education, and well-being of millions of schoolchildren in Africa now but will impact the future development and human capital of whole countries;

MINDFUL that we have less than three years left to achieve the commitments and targets agreed upon in the 'Malabo Declaration' and the 'Africa Regional Nutrition Strategy to end hunger and undernutrition, and the resulting need for stronger action by partners and AU member states;

RECOGNISING that averting a generational catastrophe will require the rethinking of entire food and social systems on the continent, and **APPRECIATING** that Home-Grown School Feeding programmes can be such a policy lever that benefits several sectors at once, and have spillover effects on whole communities and economies;

¹ Elaborated in the Call to Action of the 6th High Level Dialogue on Gender Equality in Education convened by the AU-CIEFFA in collaboration with the government of Sierra Leone under the theme: "Developing Africa's human, social and economic capital by increasing resilience of African girls through quality nutrition and education".

ACKNOWLEDGING limitations in the legal, technical and policy frameworks to guide home-grown school feeding and to improve linkages of school feeding programmes with local procurement and agricultural value chains;

HAVING CONSIDERED the state of school feeding in Africa, **HAVING LISTENED** to AU Member States, AU Commission, AUDA-NEPAD and Development Partners both during the technical and commemorative discussions on 27th of February and on 1st March 2023, **COGNISANT** of the ADSF and AU themes of 2023 and **BEARING IN MIND** all previous Assembly Decisions and ADSF communiqués on home-grown school feeding, and galvanizing the engagement of multi sectorial stakeholders and to attaining the needed level of capacity and financing to drive forward commitments and action:

[Operative paragraphs]

1. **CALL UPON** AU Member States to:
 - a) Develop sustainable national financing plans that allow them to sustain and increase domestic financing for school feeding programmes subject to each country's capacity to scale up programmes.
 - b) Ensure that new national development, food system and nutrition policies place school feeding amongst primary development initiatives and revise existing school feeding policies and legislative frameworks to enhance the procurement of locally available and indigenous foods, to support the development of local economies and communities, and enhance nutrition outcomes.
 - c) Develop national targets and plans towards establishing sustainable national school meal programmes and continue formulating national commitments to the School Meals Coalition; and continue having regional conversations to contextualize the aims of the coalition, facilitate knowledge exchange, and strengthen support networks within regions.
 - d) Accelerate implementation of the AUDA-NEPAD continental guidelines on the design and implementation of HGSF programmes and optimize HGSF programme value chains; gradually increase reliance on local production sources, improve the infrastructure that links producers to markets; support producers' access to capitals and/or loans; and support the organization of cooperatives.
 - e) Promote greater coordination among and between sectors², to recognize the multisectoral nature of Home-Grown School Feeding and to seize the full potential of school feeding programs.
2. **CALL FOR** partners and donors to provide the financial and technical support required to augment country efforts to protect children from the impact of the colliding crises, particularly in low-income countries and develop a new compact that responds to the transition towards greater country ownership and funding.
3. **CALL FOR** the promotion of knowledge and experience sharing on Africa's school meals programme and Africa's leadership in the school meals coalition at global events including the upcoming UN Food Systems Stocktaking Moment in 2023, and at COP 28, towards

² Education, Agriculture, Health, Finance etc

strengthening agrifood systems in Africa. This will also provide national governments with robust insights and pathways to drive informed policy dialogue and investments.

4. **ENDORSE** that investments in school feeding should not only focus on the demand-side but also on the supply-side, such as increasing local production capacities, and **CALL ON** member states and partners to optimize procurement arrangements that facilitate the transition to decentralized processes on purchasing, transport, delivery, and storage commodities, which supports food systems and diverse, more nutritious diets.
5. **ADOPT** this Communiqué, **FURTHER REQUEST** the AU Commission, AUDA-NEPAD and Development Partners, specifically those in the Home-Grown School Feeding Cluster, to work with Member States on implementing school feeding-related commitments, and review progress on their implementation.
6. **EXPRESS** appreciation to Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Kingdom of Morocco for successfully hosting the 8th Africa Day of School Feeding.

Done on 1st March 2023.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Rabat, Morocco