

ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

6–8 October • ADB Headquarters, Manila



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Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

Building Sustainable School Feeding Systems: Evidence, Government Capacity, and Pathways to Scale





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**What makes a
school meal
programme successful?**

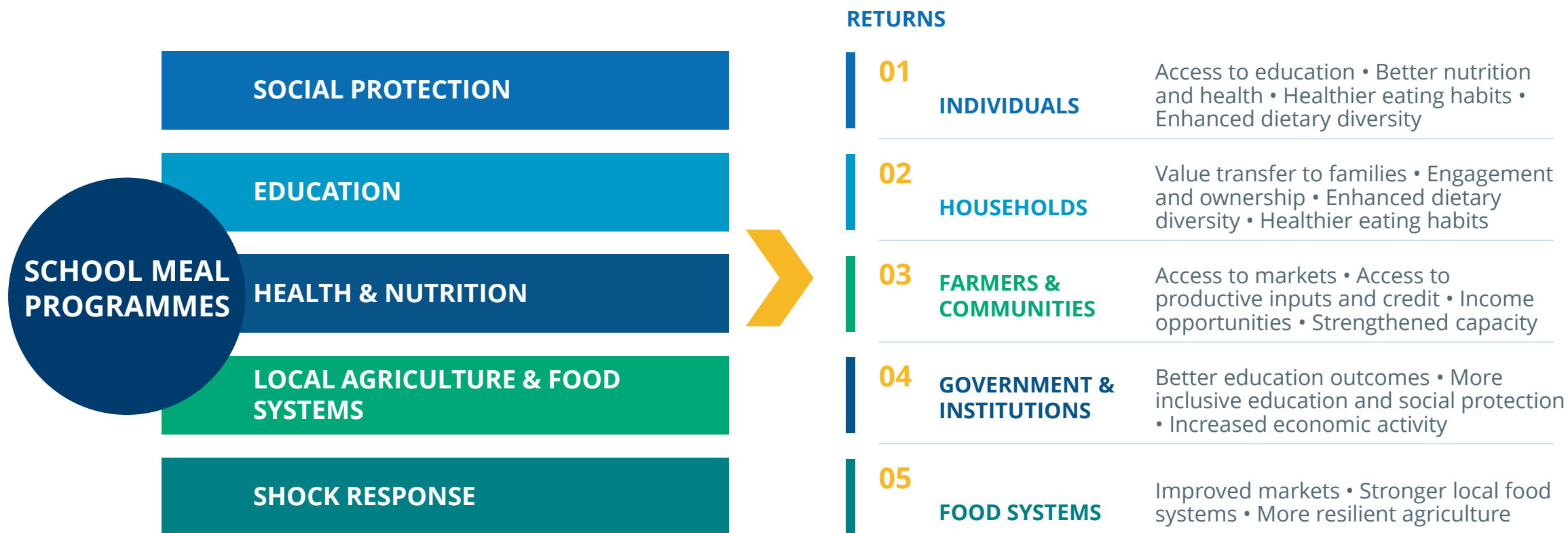




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A single school meal works through several channel at once, generating multiple returns





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School meals are the world's most widespread safety net

1963

First school meals programme in Togo with WFP direct support

THE FIRST LESSON

A reliable meal could help a child stay in school.

THE EVOLUTION

2008 Food, fuel and financial crises

2009 Rethinking School Feeding

2013 Government systems move centre stage

2020 Strategy 2020–2030

2021 School Meals Coalition

A global, government-led network with 113 governments, 6 regional bodies, and over 160 partners. A common goal: every child has access to a healthy, nutritious meal in school.

SCALE TODAY

466M

children receive a meal at school

99%

of USD 84B annual spend comes from national budgets

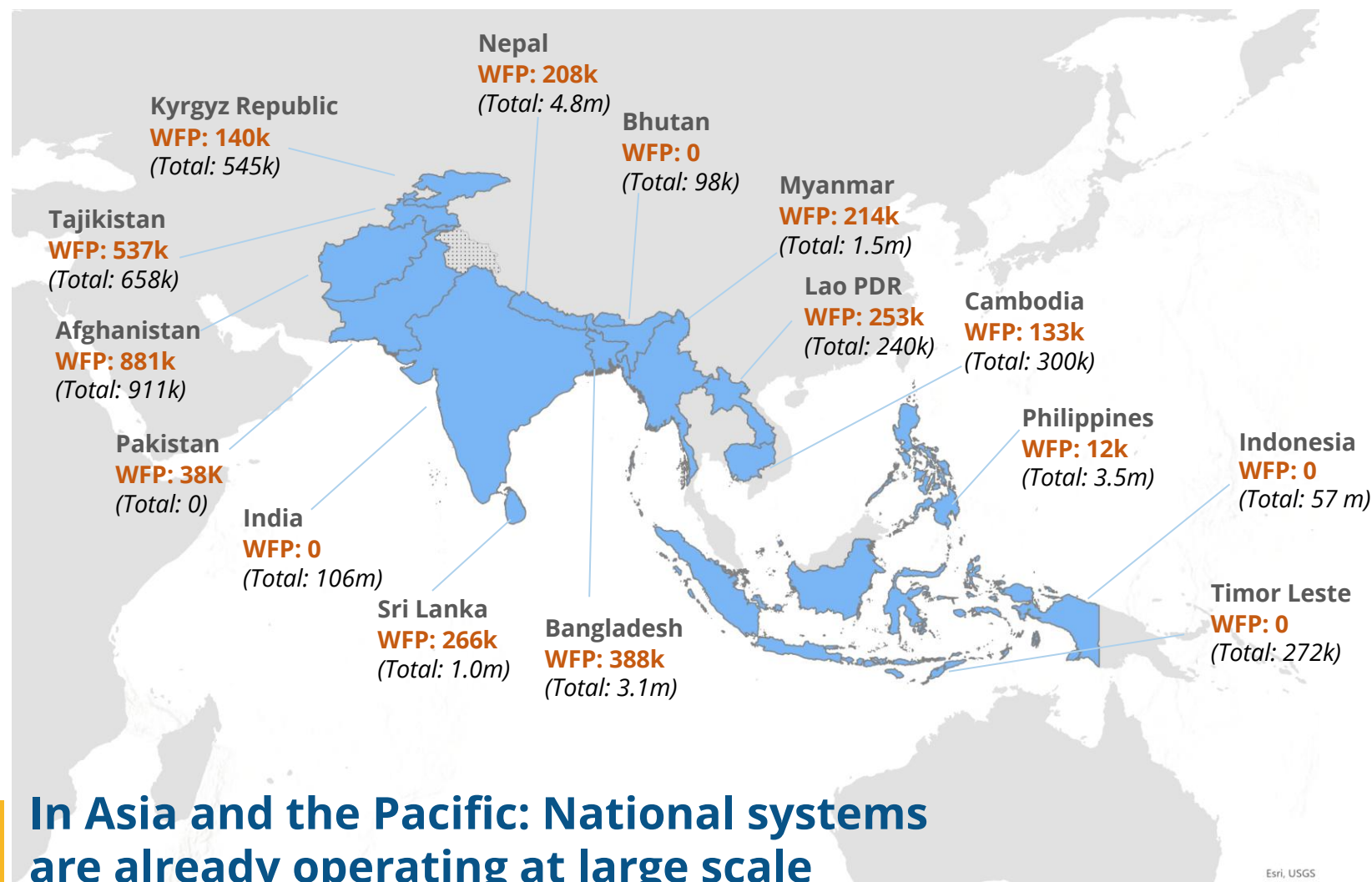
Yet

About half of schoolchildren remain unreached.



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TOTAL COVERAGE:

180 M

WFP COVERAGE:

3.07M

≈1.7% of total

Sources:
Total coverage: GCNF 2024, ACR 2025
except Indonesia data from government
WFP coverage: ACR 2025

Esri, USGS



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School meals improve attendance, learning and dietary diversity



2.6 pp

average attendance gain

Across 57 studies, mostly in low- and middle-income countries.

Wang et al., 2021

DIETARY DIVERSITY

Hot, regular and diversified meals aligned with national nutrition standards improve dietary diversity and food security.

World Bank-WFP DIME, 2024

0.15–0.20 SD

gains in maths and literacy

Across 40 study arms in 19 countries. More cost-effective than many standard education interventions.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

US\$1 → US\$7–35

Returns across learning, nutrition, protection, jobs and food systems.

School meals employ 1,591 cooks per 100,000 children, about 7.4 million worldwide. Local food purchasing creates predictable markets for smallholders, encourages crop diversity and boosts rural economies.



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IN CONCLUSION

466M

children already receive school meals, funded from national budgets.

WAY FORWARD

Multi-sector, government-led

Reach the poorest children

Improve meal quality

Make programmes shock-ready