

**COMMEMORATION OF THE 6th AFRICAN DAY OF SCHOOL FEEDING - 1ST MARCH 2021
DRAFT COMMUNIQUÉ**

We, the African Union (AU) Member States, the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as distinguished invitees,

RECALLING previous AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government declarations and decisions on home-grown school feeding that recognise its contributions to improving access to education and learning outcomes, and the positive impact it plays in strengthening local and rural economies and food systems as a means of tackling malnutrition and improving livelihoods. Assembly Decision 589 (XXVI) adopted at the Assembly's 26th Ordinary Session held on 30-31 January 2016 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Growth and Transformation adopted at the Assembly's 23rd Ordinary Session held on 26-27 June 2014 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea;

REAFFIRMING our commitment towards advancing the school feeding agenda, particularly home-grown-school feeding that can serve as a critical safety net and multi-sectoral delivery platform, providing multiple benefits for school-age children, smallholder farmers and communities;

BEARING IN MIND that the 2021 continental commemoration of the African Day of School Feeding is an opportunity to raise awareness on its importance and to renew past AU commitments on school feeding and its complementary benefits and contributions;

AWARE that the 2021 African Day of School Feeding is commemorated under the theme "Harnessing Africa's Traditional Knowledge and Food to Support Sustainable School Feeding Programmes and Systems During COVID-19 Response and Beyond", owing to this year's African Union theme - Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage - and in light of COVID-19 pandemic;

TAKING COGNISANCE of the Communiqué of the 11th Africa Day for Food and Nutrition Security dated 30th October 2020, that among others, recommends that AU Member States and their Development Partners place special emphasis on promoting indigenous and neglected food crops to deliver healthier diets on the continent;

TAKING NOTE of the African Union Biennial Report on Home-Grown School Feeding (2019-2020);

APPRECIATING the information presented during discussions from Ministers responsible for Education and Agriculture and subject matter experts on school feeding, health and nutrition, education, social protection and agriculture;

RECOGNISING that school feeding serves as a game-changing intervention for children (girls in particular) who benefit from being healthier and better educated, for farmers who benefit from enhanced access to more stable markets, for women (especially those with micro, small and medium-sized businesses) who benefit from providing services to school feeding programmes, and for local communities and nations who benefit from enhanced human capital and improved socio-economic development, thereby contributing to the realisation of Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want;

NOTING WITH SATISFACTION the strides made by Member States to translate AU Assembly Decision 589 (XXVI) into their national policy frameworks, with 27 Member States having in place a national school feeding policy as of 2019 up from 8 Member States in 2013;

FURTHER NOTING WITH SATISFACTION that Member States' increasing political commitment has translated to significant progress with respect to the scale-up of school feeding programmes across the continent over the last six years as is evident from the increase from 38.4 million children in 2013 to 65.4 million children in 2019 receiving school meals;

STRESSING that despite Member States making progress on adopting and implementing pro-home-grown school feeding policies and programmes over the last six years there is a need to address existing gaps, including expanding coverage to reach the most vulnerable of children, promoting their re-enrolment in schools and strengthening linkages to local food systems, and **FURTHER STRESSING** that, in this regard, Member States will need to pilot or expand home-grown school feeding programmes, enhance the quality and sustainability of school feeding programmes and explore its potential role in serving as a platform for health, nutrition and other complementary benefits for enhancing human capital;

DEEPLY CONCERNED, about the detrimental impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the nutrition, health and education of school-age children (in particular for girls) and on rural livelihoods and food systems;

ACKNOWLEDGING that as a result of COVID-19 there is a need to reimagine how home-grown school feeding is financed and implemented to ensure that we recover past development gains and build on it to achieve Agenda 2063, **AND FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGING** that this reimagining would entail Member State and development partner promotion of cross-sectoral co-financing and implementation approach to deliver multiple gains across sectors;

REALISING the need to mobilise greater political commitment such that Member States and Development Partners take urgent and concrete actions to establish or restore and expand home-grown school feeding programmes for it to reach the estimated 65 million children who lacked access to school meals during the peak of the crisis and to revive livelihoods of millions of vulnerable smallholder farmers;

HAVING CONSIDERED the state of school feeding in Africa, **COGNISANT** of the AU theme of 2021 and the impact of COVID-19 and **BEARING IN MIND** all previous Assembly Decisions on home-grown school feeding,

1. **CALLS UPON** Member States and Development Partners to take action to ensure that as school systems reopen safely, access to school feeding is restored as an urgent priority to drive children back into school and support their recovery;
2. **REQUESTS** the African Union Commission, AUDA-NEPAD and Development Partners to support Member States to improve coverage and prioritise countries where vulnerable school-age children are not yet supported through school feeding programmes;
3. **RECOGNISES** that home-grown school feeding programmes can serve as a vehicle to promote Africa's diverse culture, culinary heritage and indigenous food crops for healthier diets by providing smallholder farmers with a reliable market outlet and children with nutritious and traditional meals, and **ENCOURAGES** Member States and Development Partners to integrate indigenous crops and nutritious and traditional recipes into their home-grown school feeding programmes.

4. **URGES** AUDA-NEPAD and Development Partners to work with Member States and provide technical support to develop nutrition guidelines and standards that contribute towards shaping children's tastes and demand for healthy, local and nutritious foods;
5. **URGES** Member States to explore co-financing funding arrangements that bring together key stakeholder ministries, departments and agencies to pool budgets and resources across sectors for home-grown school feeding programmes to engender inter-sectoral collaboration, action and scale-up, and **CALLS ON** Development Partners to increase financial and technical assistance to address existing gaps to support the scale-up of home-grown school feeding programmes.
6. **WELCOMES** the WFP's announcement on its plans to work with school feeding stakeholders to establish a global coalition that advances the home-grown school feeding agenda in continental and global platforms, including the forthcoming United Nations Food Systems Summit (FSS), and **ENCOURAGES** Member States to join the soon-to-be global coalition, advocate for the placement of home-grown school feeding on the FSS's agenda, and discuss home-grown school feeding in national dialogues related to the FSS;
7. **REQUESTS** the African Union Commission and the Home-Grown School Feeding Cluster to organise follow-up technical and political dialogues with Member States and partners as a means of formulating concrete actions that respond to the immediate health, nutrition and education needs of children and promote local food systems and Africa's rich culinary heritage; and to reinvigorate high-level political commitment required to drive the implementation of such actions;
8. **APPRECIATE** and express gratitude to Dubai Cares for supporting the Home-Grown School Feeding agenda of the African Union through an amount of 4million USD in partnership with WFP.

Done virtually on 1st March 2021.