

Sustainable School Meals:
Clean Cooking for Health, Climate and Education Transformation

Linking food and energy systems as a catalyst for development – ensuring school meals that are as safe and sustainable to cook, as they are nutritious to eat.

Clean cooking in schools is one of the **highest-leverage investments in global development** — advancing energy transitions, climate commitments, improving child health, strengthening food systems, and driving local economic growth through a single entry point.

The Platform for Clean Cooking in Schools was launched at COP30 as a priority under the Presidency's Action Agenda - tackling the dual challenge of energy security and food security - while ensuring a just and equitable transition that leaves no one behind.

30+ PARTNERS

10 COUNTRIES IN IMPLEMENTATION*

* Additional countries have also expressed interest in taking part in the programme.

The Platform brings ambition and planning with policy and finance to deliver impact – creating conditions to mobilise support across the board to accelerate a clean cooking transition in schools, and serving as a flagship initiative to bring together governments, financiers and delivery partners to mobilize resources, scale innovation and align policies. This Platform supports the School Meals Coalition and its goals to ensure every child has access to school meals that are healthy and nutritious – while strengthening the role of schools as catalysts for community-wide energy transitions.



TURNING VISION INTO IMPACT

THE GOAL:

Enable sustainable school meal preparation for an **additional 100 million students by 2030**, through scalable models interconnecting energy and food systems while improving health, environmental and economic outcomes, and livelihoods.

LEARN ABOUT OUR APPROACH →

OUR APPROACH

COUNTRY ACTION

Supporting governments in prioritizing, planning, implementing, and tracking clean cooking transitions in schools through data, technical assistance, and delivery partnerships.

FINANCING TRANSITIONS

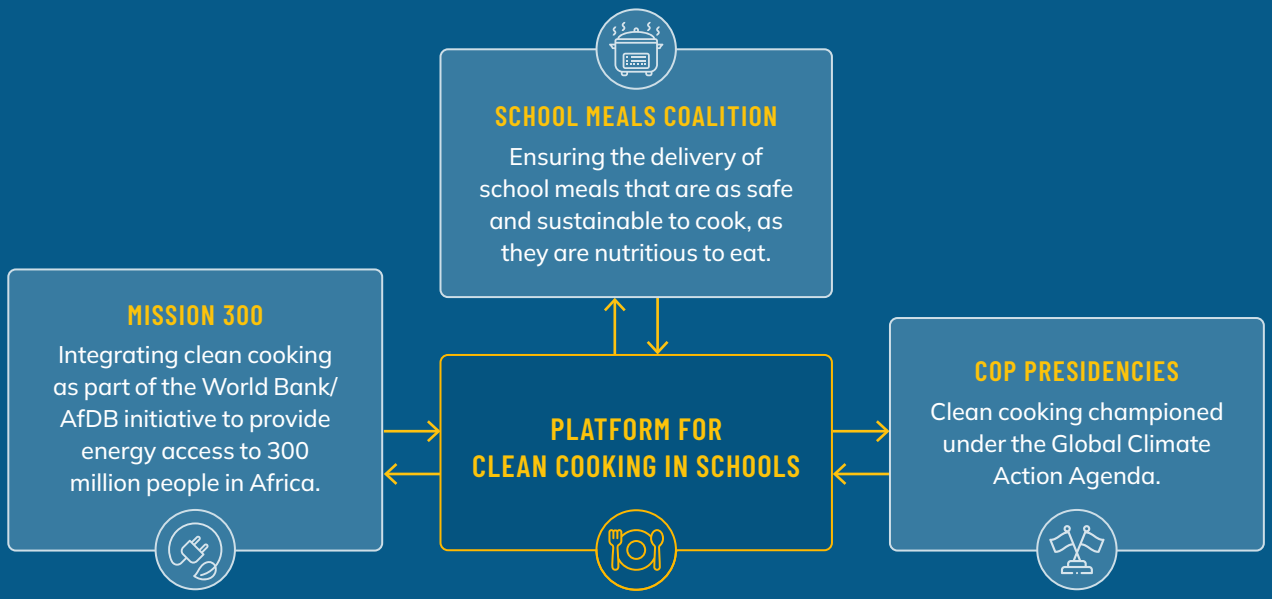
Mobilizing public and private resources to support scalable, sustainable transitions, including carbon finance flows for sustainability and scale.

ADVOCACY & ADVISORY

Elevating clean cooking in schools on the global agenda and aligning it with education, climate, and energy priorities.

Our 2026–2027 work plan is designed to move clean cooking in schools from promising pilots to sustained, large-scale delivery — reaching 100 million students while building the systems and financing needed to make it last. The Platform brings partners together under a unified strategy and pooled financing model, directing blended resources toward targeted country action.

STRATEGIC LINKAGES ACROSS ENERGY, CLIMATE AND DEVELOPMENT



The Platform for Clean Cooking in Schools is uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between global energy access, climate action and sustainable development agendas.



IMPACT OPPORTUNITY: ZAMBIA

THE CHALLENGE

In Zambia, over 80% of households and nearly all rural institutions, including schools, rely on firewood and charcoal (biomass) for cooking. Under the Home Grown School Meals Programme, communities support schools by providing cooking fuel, fetching water, building cooking shelters and cooking for learners. Meals are cooked over open fires or basic stoves, exposing cooks, who are mostly women, and students to harmful smoke. The fuel burden also falls on parents and children, and it drives deforestation around schools.

Demand for biomass fuel has also grown tremendously since the introduction of free education. More children are going to school, and the Government expects to double the number of children receiving school meals from around 2 million to 4 million by the end of 2026. Every additional meal served on firewood means more fuel, more smoke exposure and more pressure on families and forests. Reliable, affordable energy is the missing link between Zambia's commitment to universal primary education and school feeding and its ability to deliver meals safely and sustainably.

Our current clean cooking initiatives in Tanzania are structured under four pillars of action:

OPERATIONS 01

- Region and School Selection
- Kitchen Upgrades and Refurbishment
- Technology selection

COMMUNICATIONS & AWARENESS RAISING 02

- Awareness raising campaigns
- Educational materials
- Capacity building

GENDER AND YOUTH MAINSTREAMING 03

- Traineeship for young women in the energy sector – activities include: baseline assessment, advocacy and communications, etc.

INNOVATIVE FINANCE AND SCALE 04

- Carbon finance
- Revolving blended finance facility

CROSS-CUTTING: DATA, KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

This approach can be adapted to best meet the needs of the local context in Zambia

THE OPPORTUNITY

Government-led school feeding creates a large, predictable, publicly supported cooking demand, with the same meals prepared on school days across thousands of schools. Moving these kitchens to electric cooking will:

- Aggregate demand across many schools, giving suppliers and energy providers a scalable market
- Aligns with public expenditure and existing institutional frameworks for school feeding
- Delivers cleaner, faster and more reliable meal preparation for learners and cooks
- Provide a reliable productive, anchor load that stabilizes and increases electricity demand for mini-grids in areas not served by the grid.

Clean cooking in schools delivers far-reaching health, environmental, and educational benefits. It cuts indoor air pollution, lowers CO_2 emissions, and strengthens school infrastructure while enabling reliable delivery for students. The impact of these interventions acts as a powerful platform for the wider adoption of clean cooking beyond schools.

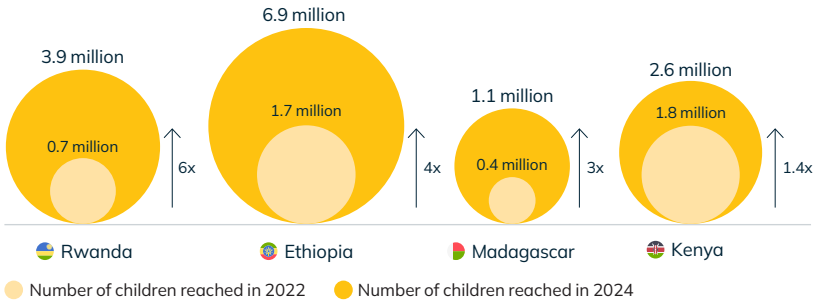
It also creates value for energy providers. Rural electrification is expanding through the grid and decentralised renewables, including the Zambia Mini-Grid Initiative led by the Rural Electrification Authority with SEforALL and partners. Communities and schools electrified via mini-grids benefit from reliable electricity, and the system benefits from the predictable day-time demand, making school kitchens exactly the kind of anchor load they need. Electric cooking can improve children's health and learning outcomes while strengthening the business case for rural electrification in Zambia.

WHY CLEAN COOKING IN SCHOOLS MATTERS NOW

Over 450 million children worldwide currently receive at least one meal a day at school, including 87 million in Sub-Saharan Africa following an increase of 20 million children since 2022. However, **many of these meals are still cooked using biomass energy**, making clean cooking in schools a transformative solution that improves not only education but also health, the environment, and livelihoods.

Schools are uniquely positioned to be part of the solution, not the problem.

African countries are leading in commitments and speed of progress on school meals yet progress on clean cooking continues to lag behind.



Sources: Direct government data, GNCF Global Surveys (2021 and 2024)



JOIN US AS PARTNERS

Clean cooking in schools is one of the highest-leverage investments in global development — a single entry point that supports education, advances climate commitments, improves child health, strengthens food systems, and drives local economic growth.

The Platform for Clean Cooking in Schools embeds clean cooking within national school meals programmes, building the policy frameworks, financing structures, and supply chains that make change stick. Tanzania has proven the model. Now we're scaling it.

The initiative links directly to supporting energy transitions, delivery of SDGs and the Paris Agreement, with the accountability that serious funders require. Governments, philanthropies, climate finance institutions, and private sector partners are already engaged.

MIKAEL MELIN
Director, Partnerships and Development,
Sustainable Energy for All
Mikael.Melin@SEforALL.org

HADLEY TAYLOR
Programme Manager,
Universal Energy Readiness,
Sustainable Energy for All
Hadley.Taylor@SEforALL.org

