ZAMBIA

Country Synthesis Report

Dialogue period: 10 April to 31 August 2026

“What picture emerges across the dialogues?”

Prepared by 4SD Foundation, assisted by AI, reviewed by World Vision Zambia.

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We thank the adults who took part in the Stakeholder Dialogues: community nutrition volunteers and Safe Motherhood Action Group members, community agents, Grow Growth Monitoring and Promotion volunteers, women caregivers in Nyawa, health post staff, community volunteers and agriculture representatives in Kantenshya, traditional leaders, and the members of the Senanga District Nutrition Coordinating Committee.

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How to read this report

What this report represents

This is a qualitative synthesis of 17 Nutrition Dialogues held in Zambia between April and August 2026 and recorded in Feedback Forms: nine Children's Workshops and eight Stakeholder Dialogues. It brings together the issues, experiences, perspectives, connections and proposed actions that participants described. It does not measure how common any experience is and does not represent Zambia as a whole.

How to understand the findings

The report draws out what appears in several dialogues while keeping the differences between places and groups, and the findings that came up in only one or two dialogues but matter for understanding the picture. Where the report gives a number of dialogues, this describes how widely an issue appeared in these records, not how many people are affected.

The actions described in this report are actions proposed by participants. They are not recommendations from 4SD Foundation, World Vision or other partners. What these findings mean for Zambia, and what should follow, are questions for the interpretation process that comes after this report has been reviewed.

Evidence limitations

- All 17 dialogues were convened by World Vision Zambia, mostly within its area programmes. Coverage is wide but thin: most places are represented by one or two dialogues.
- Children's evidence comes from workshops held in schools, so it centres on school life. Stakeholder evidence comes mainly from community volunteers and caregivers; only one dialogue brought together district-level officials.
- The Feedback Forms are written in English by convenors and rapporteurs. The language in which each dialogue was held was not recorded, so wording in this report reflects the record, not participants' own words.
- Many sessions began with facilitator presentations on nutrition, and some were organised around a pre-set topic. This shaped what was discussed, particularly around nutrition knowledge and beliefs.
- Participant numbers are approximate: four Feedback Forms record totals that do not match their own gender breakdowns, and children's ages were not systematically recorded.

Executive summary

Across 17 dialogues held between April and August 2026, children and adults in rural and peri-urban Zambia described diets built around nshima and beans, households that run short of food at certain times of year, and children whose school day is shaped by whether they have eaten. The dialogues took place in schools, health facilities and community spaces in Manyinga, Kasama, Isoka, Mwinilunga, Chama, Senanga and Kafue districts and in the Nyawa, Twoford and Kantenshya areas.

Food is lost before harvest, and it also leaves the household after harvest. Children in Misamfu, Suwila and Chama described floods, storms and droughts that destroy crops. Learners in several schools described goats and cattle that destroy household and school gardens, and children in Chama described elephants and monkeys raiding fields. Adults in volunteer dialogues described a second route: harvests sold to meet household needs, caterpillars sold rather than eaten, seasonal foods not preserved and fruit left to waste. In both cases participants said that households were left without enough food until the next harvest.

Children see nutrition through the school day. In seven of the nine Children's Workshops, learners discussed school meals. They described meals that reached only some schools and, in some places, were served only two or three days a week and consisted mainly of maize and beans. They also described going to school without breakfast or eating only one meal a day, losing energy and concentration, and in some cases staying home to work or look for food. In some accounts, attendance was higher on feeding days.

Adults see nutrition through how households manage food and care. Volunteers described parents who leave young children with older siblings while they trade or farm, disagreements between women and men about who mismanages food and money, and, in Senanga, beliefs that keep eggs from pregnant women and children and colostrum from newborns. A district committee in Senanga described services that are far away, thinly staffed, short of funding and not well coordinated.

Knowing what to eat is not the same as being able to eat it. Lack of knowledge about balanced diets came up in most dialogues, but participants also described what knowledge alone cannot overcome: lack of money, water, land and seed, livestock damage, and the demands of work and care. Adolescents in Misamfu said that even those who know what a varied diet looks like eat the same cheap foods because there is no money for anything else.

Participants proposed action at different levels. Children asked leaders, parents and government to support regular, varied school meals, enforce by-laws on livestock and provide water, and asked for a say in what is served at school and in how food money is spent at home. Volunteers proposed to act themselves, working with traditional and faith leaders, while the district committee focused on coordination, roles and resources. Gardens, orchards, small livestock, food preservation and cooking demonstrations were proposed in many places.

1. Introduction

The Nutrition Dialogues create spaces in which children, communities and other stakeholders talk about food and nutrition in their own terms. Each dialogue is recorded by its convenor in a Feedback Form that sets out the challenges, urgent actions, areas of divergence and overall picture that emerged.

This Country Synthesis Report brings the Zambia Feedback Forms from 2026 into one account. Looking across them makes it possible to see which experiences appear in different places, how they differ between communities and between children and adults, how participants connect one problem to another, and what they themselves want to change.

The report follows a set progression. It first describes the nutrition issues participants raised, then the connections they drew between them. It then considers what children and stakeholders each bring into view, sets out the actions participants proposed, and ends with what the dialogues help us see about food and nutrition in the places where they were held.

2. About the Nutrition Dialogues

Seventeen dialogues held between 10 April and 31 August 2026 form the basis of this report. Nine were Children's Workshops held in schools, and eight were Stakeholder Dialogues. The gender breakdowns recorded in the Feedback Forms indicate approximately 450 participants: about 280 children (roughly 155 girls and 125 boys) and about 165 stakeholder participants (roughly 100 women and 65 men). Four Feedback Forms contain participant totals that do not match their own gender breakdowns, so these figures should be treated as approximate pending country-team review.

Dialogue type	Number	Participants (approx.)	Who took part
Children's Workshops	9	About 280 learners	Primary and secondary school learners; adolescents in Misamfu and Senanga
Stakeholder Dialogues	8	About 165 adults	Community nutrition volunteers and Safe Motherhood Action Group members; community agents; Grow Growth Monitoring and Promotion volunteers; women caregivers; health post staff and agriculture representatives; District Nutrition Coordinating Committee members

The Children's Workshops took place in schools in Manyinga District in North-Western Province, Misamfu in Kasama District (two workshops), Suwila in Isoka District, Kantamba Primary School in Nyawa, Muwozi Zone in Mwinilunga District, Chama District in Eastern Province, Situnga Primary School in Senanga District, and a peri-urban school in Kafue District in Lusaka Province. Most were rural. Children drew, discussed in small groups and presented their ideas.

The Stakeholder Dialogues brought together community nutrition volunteers in a community linked to World Vision's Chongwe office and at a health facility; community agents in Twoford and food producers in the Manyinga area; Grow Growth Monitoring and Promotion volunteers at Sikumbi Rural Health Centre in Senanga; women caregivers in Nyawa; community members, health post staff and agriculture representatives at Kantenshya Health Post; and the District Nutrition Coordinating Committee at Senanga District Hospital. One volunteer dialogue also included ten young people aged 12 to 18. All Feedback Forms were written in English. The full list of dialogues is in Annex A.

3. What nutrition issues emerge across the Dialogues?

Meals are built around nshima[1] and beans, often day after day

The most widely shared description, in 13 of the 17 dialogues, was of meals built around one or two staples. Children in Suwila said that school meals were mainly beans and nshima: filling, but lacking variety. Learners at Kantamba described school meals of maize meal and beans, and children in Mwinilunga said beans were usually the only relish at home. Adolescents in Misamfu said they ate the same food at home every day, and children in Chama said that most households grow mainly maize, with few legumes, vegetables or fruits.

Adults described the same pattern from the household side. Volunteers in the Chongwe area said most households rely on high-carbohydrate foods, and that crop choice is limited by small fields, the cost of seed and a reliance on crops supported by government input programmes and bought by the Food Reserve Agency. They also observed households buying more processed foods, even for young children, as a way of "modernising".

School meals reach some schools, on some days

In seven of the nine Children's Workshops, learners spoke about school meals. Their accounts were consistent in outline but varied in detail. In Manyinga, children said very few schools in the area provide meals, and those that do serve them on about two days a week. Learners at Kantamba and in Suwila described meals twice a week; in Kafue, two or three days a week. At secondary level in Misamfu there was no school feeding at all, and adolescents with pocket money said the school market sold only junk food. In Misamfu, some schools provide porridge, but children said some parents forbid their children to eat it (see Section 5). In Chama, children felt that parents and community leaders were not doing enough to supplement the food provided at school.

Floods, droughts and animals destroy food before it is harvested

In 11 dialogues, participants linked food shortages to weather and the seasons. Children in Misamfu described floods and storms that destroy crops; learners in Suwila described droughts and floods; children in Chama spoke of climate change bringing poor yields and crop failure. Children in Mwinilunga and participants in Kantenshya described the dry months as a time when vegetables and fresh produce become scarce, and adolescents in Senanga spoke of fresh produce disappearing at certain times of year.

Animals were a second, very concrete threat. Children in Manyinga, Suwila, Mwinilunga and Kafue described goats and cattle that destroy household and school gardens, so that vegetables are rare and schools cannot keep gardens at all. In Chama, children described elephants, monkeys and other wild animals invading fields before harvest, and the Senanga district committee listed conflict between people and wildlife among the causes of food insecurity. Participants in Kantenshya doubted that fruit trees could be planted on a large scale because of land shortages and livestock.

Food also leaves the household after harvest

Several dialogues described food that is produced but does not stay in the household. Volunteers in the Chongwe area said food is available at harvest time, but much of it is sold to raise money for basic needs because households have no other income, so what remains does not last until the next harvest. Volunteers meeting at a health facility said there is enough food production in their community, yet most people sell all their farm produce, and caterpillars that are caught are mostly sold, leaving little for the household. Children in Chama made the same observation about their parents.

[1] a thick maize-meal staple

Others described food that is not kept. Volunteers said seasonal foods are not preserved. In Nyawa, women caregivers spoke of a bumper harvest after good rains in 2025/26, while naming limited skills in preparing and preserving local foods as a reason for malnutrition among young children. In Kantenshya, participants described mango, orange and banana trees that are abundant but under-used, with high fruit wastage because there is no way to preserve or sell the fruit.

Water decides whether gardens survive the dry season

Seven dialogues, mostly with children, raised water. Adolescents in Misamfu said there was not enough water to irrigate gardens beyond the rainy season, and that erratic water supply discouraged households from keeping backyard gardens. Learners at Kantamba described depending on wild fruits and vegetables in season because the area has no orchards and little water for growing food, and linked inadequate water and sanitation to poor hygiene at school. Children in Mwinilunga and Chama named water as a constraint on vegetables and fruit, and the Senanga district committee pointed to limited safe drinking water.

Knowing what to eat, and having the means to eat it

Limited knowledge among parents and caregivers came up in 14 dialogues: what foods to eat, when and how to prepare them, which crops to grow, what makes a balanced diet, and the value of local foods. Food producers in the Manyinga area said that crops are grown “as a tradition” and that what a child is fed depends on what is available at that time of year, rather than on its nutritional value. Adolescents in Misamfu said they had not been taught early how to prepare simple local meals such as nshima, chibwabwa (pumpkin leaves) and inswa (termites).

Participants were also clear that knowledge does not settle the matter. Money came up in six dialogues: children in Misamfu and Senanga and adults in Twoford said families could not afford meat, fish, fruit and vegetables. In Misamfu, adolescents put it directly: those with knowledge do not have the money to buy a variety of foods, so they eat the same cheap foods, such as small dried sardines and soya chunks.

Who manages food at home is contested

In two volunteer dialogues, women and men disagreed openly. In the Chongwe area, women said men do not take part in caring for children’s nutrition and mismanage household income and harvested crops; men said some women lack knowledge of household food management and spend on their own needs rather than their children’s. The record notes a belief that men who help with household chores are weaker and “not men enough”. At a health facility, men again said some women lack knowledge of managing food, and women said some men sell crops and spend the money on beer. Women caregivers in Nyawa named insufficient male involvement as one reason for malnutrition among young children.

The same two volunteer dialogues described parents who leave children under five with young girls or younger siblings while they go to trade or to the fields, and said that these young carers do not know when or what to feed the children or how to prepare food hygienically. In Kafue, children named polygamy as one cause of malnutrition, saying that household resources are divided between two or three homes.

Beliefs about what mothers and young children should eat

Beliefs about food were discussed most specifically by Grow Growth Monitoring and Promotion volunteers at Sikumbi in Senanga, in a dialogue organised around this topic. They described beliefs that pregnant women should not eat eggs, that children should not be given eggs or groundnuts, that colostrum should not be given to newborns, and that women who have just given birth should not eat vegetables. Women caregivers in Nyawa referred more generally to cultural norms that limit nutritious foods for pregnant and breastfeeding women and young children, and the Senanga district committee said cultural beliefs hinder good feeding practices.

Services are distant, thinly staffed and not always joined up

The Senanga District Nutrition Coordinating Committee described the constraints on nutrition services: long distances to health facilities and too little transport for outreach; few trained nutrition staff; insufficient funding, leading to shortages of food supplements at health facilities; weak monitoring and coordination; low literacy among community-based volunteers and a lack of training materials in local languages; too little nutrition messaging in schools; and the exclusion of people with disabilities from nutrition programmes. Food producers in the Manyinga area said that nutrition information now reaches mainly expectant and new mothers through monthly Ministry of Health meetings, whereas fathers and grandmothers were once included, and that agriculture nutrition officers have few platforms to share what they know. In Kantenshya, participants pointed to poor coordination between health and agriculture.

4. How do these issues connect?

Participants did more than list problems. In many dialogues they described how one thing leads to another. These connections form several separate routes rather than a single chain.

When the harvest is sold, the household runs short before the next one

Two volunteer dialogues described a full sequence. In the Chongwe area, participants explained that households have no other income, so they sell much of their harvest to meet basic needs; what is kept is not enough to reach the next harvest; this leads to food insecurity and continued malnutrition among young children. Volunteers at a health facility gave the same account in their own terms: most people sell all their produce, households are left with insufficient food, and children become malnourished. They added that caterpillars, a protein-rich seasonal food, are mostly sold as soon as they are caught. In Chama, children described the first step of this route, saying their parents sell most of their produce and keep little for the household.

Shocks and animals take food before it reaches the household

Children in Misamfu traced a sequence from floods and storms to destroyed crops, poor harvests, less food at home and food insecurity. Children in Suwila and Chama and adults in Senanga and Nyawa described similar links between droughts, floods or climate change and household food shortages. A separate route runs through animals: in Manyinga, Suwila, Mwinilunga and Kafue, children explained that goats and cattle destroy gardens, so there are few vegetables at home and schools cannot keep gardens; in Chama, wild animals destroy crops before harvest, reducing both food and income. Children in Mwinilunga added that lack of water and of good-quality seeds also keeps vegetables scarce in the dry season, though they disagreed about which mattered most.

An empty morning follows a child into the classroom

Adolescents in Misamfu drew a direct line from home to school. In one workshop they explained that because there is not enough food at home they eat only once a day, in the evening, and that this leaves them without energy during the day and affects their understanding of lessons. In another, they said most pupils leave home without breakfast, either because there is no food or because there is no time to prepare it, and that the resulting lack of energy leads to dozing in class, dodging school and, in some cases, stealing.

Other children described related links separately. Learners in Manyinga, Chama and Kafue said attendance is higher on days when school meals are served. In Suwila, they said that irregular school meals reduce attendance and concentration. In Manyinga and Kafue, children said hunger leads learners to abscond from classes and do poorly, and that some children stay away to do piece work to support their parents; in Chama, some stay at home to find food for themselves and their families.

Parents' work shapes who feeds the youngest children

In the Chongwe area and at a health facility, volunteers connected the demands of earning a living to the care of young children. When parents go to trade or to work in the fields, children under five are left with young girls or younger siblings, who, the volunteers said, do not know when to feed them, what to give them or how to prepare food hygienically.

Beliefs and fears can keep food from those who need it

Two quite different connections show beliefs standing between children and food. At Sikumbi, volunteers linked the avoidance of eggs, groundnuts and vegetables and the withholding of colostrum to malnutrition, poor growth, illness and weakness in children; these beliefs had been raised by the facilitators at the start of the session, and the volunteers discussed and agreed on their consequences. In Misamfu, adolescents described a fear among some parents that porridge served at school is poisonous, and a feeling that only children from poor homes eat school food, leading parents to forbid their children from eating it.

Participants described these routes separately. They did not trace weather, the sale of harvests or household relations through to what happens at school, and they are presented here as separate routes.

5. What do children tell us?

Children see nutrition through the school day

When children talked about nutrition, they talked about school. Their accounts are organised around the days when meals are served and the days when they are not, around mornings without breakfast and afternoons without energy, and around what grows, or does not grow, in the school garden. School is where they notice hunger in themselves and others: in Suwila, children spoke of their concern about peers who are stunted or underweight; in Manyinga and Kafue, children described malnutrition as a danger to their own lives and to their communities.

School meals are welcomed, counted in days, and judged by what is on the plate

Children valued school meals and were precise about them. They counted feeding days: about two in Manyinga, Suwila and Kantamba, two or three in Kafue. They described the food: beans and nshima, maize meal and beans, beans or high-energy protein supplement with cabbage. They noticed which schools have meals and which do not, and that secondary schools in Misamfu have none. Children in Manyinga, Suwila, Kantamba, Chama and Kafue linked regular meals to attendance, concentration or performance, and they wanted more variety: proteins and vitamins as well as maize.

Hunger can pull children away from school

Children described what happens when food runs out. Some go to school without eating; some doze in class; some leave lessons. In Manyinga and Kafue, children said some learners stay away to do piece work to support their parents, and in Chama that some stay at home to find food for themselves and their families. In Misamfu, adolescents linked hunger to stealing. These accounts came from children themselves and are recorded here in the terms in which they were reported.

Children notice what shapes their parents' choices

Children did not see hunger as their parents' fault alone. They named parents' limited knowledge of which crops to grow and how to prepare food, but also poverty, floods and droughts, animals in the gardens, lack of water, late delivery of farming inputs and lack of support for farmers. They observed how households stretch scarce food: in Misamfu, parents who can afford to pack food for school usually do so only for younger children. In Kafue, children named the division of resources between households in polygamous families. In Misamfu, they also described social pressures: some parents keep children away from school porridge out of fear or stigma.

Children want a say in food decisions

In two workshops, children asked for a direct role. Learners at Kantamba said they are not involved in choosing the meals provided under the government school feeding programme and want to help decide what is served. Adolescents in Misamfu proposed that children take part in planning the household food budget, so that what they know about nutrition can be used at home. In Senanga, children expressed the wish to act as agents of change in their homes and communities.

Children differ by place and by background

Children's accounts were not uniform. Secondary-school adolescents in Misamfu described one meal a day and junk food at the school market; primary learners elsewhere spoke more about school meals and gardens. Children in Chama faced wild animals; those in Manyinga, Mwinilunga and Kafue faced goats and cattle. In Mwinilunga, children from farming households spoke with more confidence about crops and livestock, while children from non-farming households emphasised what gardens offer for learning and nutrition, and children disagreed about whether livestock, water or seeds were the main obstacle. In Misamfu, most children wanted government to provide farming inputs, but some argued that communities should buy their own as a sign of commitment.

6. What do stakeholders tell us?

Volunteers see malnutrition taking shape inside households

Community volunteers brought into view what happens to food and to young children inside the household. They described harvests sold for cash, food not preserved, children under five fed at irregular times by young carers, meals of mainly carbohydrates, and caregivers who have food but lack the skills to prepare it. They spoke from the position of people already working with caregivers: volunteers at a health facility said they were teaching caregivers how to feed children balanced meals, and Grow Growth Monitoring and Promotion volunteers at Sikumbi described themselves as already embedded in their community.

Women and men see household food management differently

In the Chongwe area and at a health facility, women and men each said the other mismanaged food and money. These views were recorded side by side and are not resolved here. Women caregivers in Nyawa, in a dialogue that included only women, named insufficient male involvement as a reason for malnutrition.

Food beliefs around pregnancy, birth and infancy

Adults, not children, discussed food beliefs. Volunteers at Sikumbi named specific restrictions on eggs, groundnuts, colostrum and vegetables, and saw themselves as the people who could discuss these beliefs with families. Food producers in the Manyinga area described nutrition conversations that once included fathers and grandmothers but now reach mainly new mothers, and asked for these conversations to be held in the community and at church meetings as well as in schools, so that the message reaches everyone.

A district committee describes a service system under strain

The Senanga District Nutrition Coordinating Committee offered a view that does not appear in the community dialogues: that of the people who plan and deliver services. They described gaps in access, staffing, funding, supplies, monitoring and coordination, and named people with disabilities as a group not adequately reached by nutrition programmes. Their account sits alongside, rather than inside, the household and school realities that children and volunteers described.

Local routes to more varied food: savings, fruit and preservation

Two dialogues explored particular local resources. Community agents in Twoford saw Savings Groups as a way for families to save, take small loans, start businesses and invest in food production, making nutritious food more affordable. In Kantenshya, participants explored why abundant mango, orange and banana trees contribute so little to children's diets, pointing to fruit wastage, limited awareness among caregivers and weak links between health and agriculture.

Where children's and adults' accounts meet

Children and adults described the same monotonous diets, the same knowledge gaps and the same pressures from weather and water. They differed mainly in what they looked at. Children described hunger as they meet it at school and at the family meal. Adults described the decisions and relationships behind the household food supply: selling, storing, caring, believing and organising services. Adults said little about school meals, and children said little about food beliefs around pregnancy and infancy; this reflects the topics each group was asked to discuss as much as their priorities.

7. What actions do participants propose?

Actions already underway

Some participants described work they were already doing. Volunteers at a health facility were teaching caregivers how to feed children balanced meals. Grow Growth Monitoring and Promotion volunteers at Sikumbi were working in their communities. Savings Groups already existed in Twoford. In Mwinilunga, children said that where school gardens exist, they contribute to school meals and teach practical skills. The Senanga District Nutrition Coordinating Committee committed its members to working together on the gaps they identified.

Regular, varied school meals, with children's voices in them

Children asked for school meals to be served every day and to include proteins and vitamins as well as maize. In Manyinga and Kafue, children asked traditional and faith leaders to mobilise community contributions for school meals and asked government to give school feeding priority in the national budget so that it covers all schools and grades; adolescents in Misamfu asked government and partners to extend it to secondary schools; children in Suwila and Chama asked local leaders and other stakeholders to support it. Learners at Kantamba asked to take part in choosing school meals. Adolescents in Misamfu also asked for breakfast for all children, healthy local foods in lunch boxes, and a ban on selling junk food on school premises.

Growing more varied food at home and at school

Gardens, orchards and small livestock were proposed in 13 dialogues. Children proposed school and household gardens and orchards; adults proposed home gardens, chickens, goats and other small livestock, and crop diversification beyond maize. Participants named what would make this possible: enforcement of existing by-laws to control goats and cattle (Manyinga, Suwila, Kafue), fencing and community awareness of livestock management (Mwinilunga), by-laws to protect fruit trees (Kantenshya), water harvesting and irrigation, links to extension services and good-quality seed, timely farming inputs, and climate-smart farming. At Kantamba, learners asked government to mechanise the school borehole and build separate toilets for boys and girls, and asked the school to apply to the Constituency Development Fund for poultry and goat rearing.

Keeping, preparing and sharing food

Participants proposed to keep more food in the household and to make better use of it: preserving seasonal foods such as caterpillars and dried vegetables, keeping enough of the harvest for home use rather than selling it all, drying fruit and making juice to reduce waste, giving children fruit as a daily snack, and holding regular cooking demonstrations so that caregivers can prepare balanced meals from local foods.

Spreading knowledge across the household and the community

Nearly every dialogue proposed nutrition education or sensitisation. The proposals differed in who they addressed. Children asked school administrators, traditional and faith leaders and parents to lead awareness efforts. Volunteers proposed to work with traditional and faith leaders at community gatherings; in the Chongwe area, they also proposed reporting parents and caregivers who do not follow nutrition advice to traditional leaders. Several dialogues called for men to become more involved. Food producers in the Manyinga area wanted nutrition discussions held in the community and at church as well as in schools, and wanted agriculture nutrition officers to have more opportunities to share their knowledge. Volunteers at Sikumbi proposed to discourage harmful food beliefs sensitively and to promote breastfeeding and hygiene. Children in Senanga asked for more nutrition dialogues in schools.

Strengthening services and coordination

The Senanga district committee proposed stronger coordination among government, NGOs and community structures, better reporting, clearer roles, greater capacity in community structures to monitor and report, better resource mobilisation, nutrition linked with agriculture, water, education and social protection, and documentation of what works. Women caregivers in Nyawa asked for malnourished children to be identified early and referred to health facilities; participants in Kantenshya asked for stronger collaboration between health and agriculture; volunteers in the Chongwe area wanted regular growth monitoring and parents bringing children to outreach points for vaccination.

8. What do the Dialogues help us see?

Two routes lead to the same empty plate

In the places where these dialogues were held, households run short of food by two different routes. On one, food never reaches the household: floods, droughts, goats, cattle, elephants and monkeys destroy it in the field. On the other, food is produced, sometimes in abundance, and then leaves: harvests and caterpillars are sold for cash, seasonal foods are not preserved, fruit goes to waste. Children mostly described the first route; volunteers mostly described the second. Both end in the same experience, which children described most vividly: one meal a day, no breakfast, maize and beans again.

Children and adults look at the same problem from different places

Children place nutrition in the school day. They measure it in feeding days, in energy in class and in who can afford to come to school at all. Adults place it in the household and in services: in the decision to sell, in who looks after the baby, in what a new mother may eat, and in whether a health worker can reach the village. Each view is partial, and the dialogues are more complete with both in view. School meals, so central to children, were barely discussed by adults; the beliefs and household arrangements that adults described were mostly outside children's accounts.

Knowing is not the same as being able to act

Lack of knowledge was named almost everywhere, and education was proposed almost everywhere. Yet participants repeatedly described constraints that knowledge does not remove: no money to buy what one knows is good, no water for a dry-season garden, no fence against the goats, no land or seed for a different crop, no one but an older sibling to feed the baby, and parents who fear school food. The adolescents in Misamfu who said that those with knowledge still eat the cheapest food put this tension most clearly.

Participants act at different levels, and children ask to be included

The actions participants proposed follow the positions they speak from. Volunteers proposed to act themselves, through community structures and traditional authority. The district committee looked to the system: coordination, roles, reporting and resources. Children mostly asked others to act, addressing parents, leaders, schools and government, but in several places they also asked for a place in the decisions: what is served at school, how food money is spent at home, and how nutrition is discussed in their communities.

9. Conclusion

The Zambia dialogues of 2026 describe nutrition as something shaped by fields, kitchens and classrooms at once. Children and adults in rural and peri-urban communities spoke of meals built on nshima and beans, of food destroyed by weather and animals before harvest, of food sold or wasted after it, of the hours children spend at school without having eaten, and of household relationships, beliefs and services that influence who eats what.

This picture comes from 17 dialogues convened in particular places and recorded by their convenors. It does not show how widespread these experiences are across Zambia. What it does offer is an account of what participants said about food and nutrition in their lives, the connections they drew, and the changes they want to see, which they expect parents, leaders, schools and government to help make, and in some cases to make themselves.

Annex A — Dialogues Included in the Synthesis

Participant figures are derived from the gender breakdown recorded in each Feedback Form. Four forms record a different overall total, so these figures should be treated as approximate pending country-team review. Dialogue language was not recorded for any dialogue; all Feedback Forms are in English.

Dialogue ID	Type	Title as recorded	Location as recorded	Event date	Participants
60200	Stakeholder Dialogue	The role of Nutritional volunteers in enhancing nutrition in the community.	Chongwe area (per acknowledgements); community setting	2026-04-10	37 (20 F, 17 M)
60442	Children's Workshop	Benefits of School Meals to Children	Rural school, Manyinga District, North-Western Province	2026-06-03	48 (22 F, 26 M)
60394	Children's Workshop	Importance of Locally Grown Foods in Nutrition	Misamfu Village, Kasama District	2026-06-04	20 (14 F, 6 M)
60402	Children's Workshop	Children's participation in the school meals	Rural school, Suwila ADP, Isoka District	2026-06-11	30 (15 F, 15 M)
60405	Children's Workshop	Children Participation in School Meals in Nyawa	Kantamba Primary School, Nyawa ADP	2026-06-11	30 (18 F, 12 M)
60541	Stakeholder Dialogue	The role of Savings Groups in increasing income to improve access to nutritious food	Twoford community	2026-06-11	16 (8 F, 8 M)
60544	Stakeholder Dialogue	The Role of Savings Groups in Improving Production of Nutritious Food	Manyinga area (convenor base)	2026-06-11	17 (8 F, 9 M)
60502	Children's Workshop	Understanding good nutrition and its Importance for school going Children	Misamfu Village, Kasama District	2026-06-17	18 (12 F, 6 M)
60640	Stakeholder Dialogue	The role of Nutrition volunteers in improving nutrition status at community level.	Health facility (not named)	2026-06-18	22 (10 F, 12 M)
60467	Children's Workshop	The importance of school garden in improving school meals	Rural school, Muwozi Zone, Mwinilunga District	2026-06-23	60 (31 F, 29 M)
60421	Children's Workshop	Children participating in Nutrition	School, Chama District, Eastern Province	2026-06-28	34 (18 F, 16 M)
60751	Children's Workshop	Understanding Good Nutrition: Children's perspectives and Practical Actions	Situnga Primary School, Imatongo ward, Senanga District	2026-07-18	23 (14 F, 9 M)
60754	Stakeholder Dialogue	District Nutrition Coordinating Committee Meeting: Exploring Gaps in Nutrition Services and Opportunities for Improvement	District Hospital, Senanga District	2026-07-22	14 (6 F, 8 M)
60732	Children's Workshop	The importance of school gardens in complementing the quality of school meals	Peri-urban school, Kafue District, Lusaka Province	2026-07-23	20 (12 F, 8 M)
60757	Stakeholder Dialogue	How Do Community Beliefs Affect Child Nutrition, and What Can We Do About Them: Grow Growth Monitoring and Promotion volunteers perspectives	Sikumbi Rural Health Centre, Silwizi ward, Senanga District	2026-07-29	16 (12 F, 4 M)
61170	Stakeholder Dialogue	Promoting Locally Nutritious foods in Nyawa Area Programme	Church building, Nyawa ADP	2026-08-28	31 (31 F, 0 M)
61203	Stakeholder Dialogue	Promotion of fruit tree planting	Kantenshya Health Post	2026-08-31	12 (5 F, 7 M)