

## Mary's Meals calls for urgent support as South Sudan food crisis deepens

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Global child hunger charity Mary's Meals has today launched an urgent campaign in response to the worsening crisis in war-torn South Sudan and is calling for support to help children in desperate need.

Across the country, a brutal civil war is raging. Fighting is forcing families from their homes, schools are being destroyed and 6.3 million people are facing a hunger crisis. As the lean season approaches, this figure is expected to rise and more than seven million people, almost two thirds of the population, could soon be at risk.

Mary's Meals has been present in South Sudan since 2008 and is already reaching 20,520 vulnerable children in the country with life-saving daily school meals. The charity is one of the few organisations providing reliable and consistent food delivery to schools in the country, working alongside its local partner organisation, the Diocese of Rumbek, to feed desperately hungry children at 40 schools in Rumbek, Yirol and Mapuordit in the Lakes state, a region that has been plagued with persistent violence and food insecurity.

One in every three schools in South Sudan has been destroyed or forced to close since conflict broke out and 72% of primary school age children across the country are missing out on an education – the highest rate in the world. By providing a nutritious daily meal in a place of learning, Mary's Meals helps to attract vulnerable children into the classroom where they can gain a basic education that could, in future, provide an escape route from poverty.

Moses Kopurot Kenyi, education coordinator for the Diocese of Rumbek, said: "It's a terrible situation. Many of the children are displaced or without their parents. They are very traumatised. There is a lot of hunger. People are just eating leaves from the trees. Mary's Meals feeding programme is helping us a lot. For these children, there is no other source of food.

"Education is really important for helping to build peace. Without education, the situation will never change. The division and anger will still be there. We have hope that this will be the generation that will bring an ever-lasting peace in South Sudan."

During this time of crisis in South Sudan, the daily meal Mary's Meals provides is not just a powerful incentive to come to school, but a vital lifeline for vulnerable children in urgent need of nourishment. For many of them, it will be the only thing they will eat each day. As growing numbers of children flee fighting in other parts of the country, enrolment at schools serving Mary's Meals is increasing.

According to the league tables published this February, Daniel Comboni Primary School, the largest school in which Mary's Meals operates in Rumbek, was ranked the highest performing school in the whole country. This is an extraordinary achievement given the circumstances in which these children live and shows the transformative impact of daily school meals.

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, global chief executive and founder of Mary's Meals, said: "The plight of children in South Sudan is truly heartbreaking. For them, the promise of a daily school meal has never been more important. Those delivering food to schools in South Sudan are telling us that heavy rain has flooded roads, making it impossible to reach some schools by car. Instead, they are carrying the heavy sacks of food on foot, sometimes over great distances, because they know how much the children in those villages need it. One of our volunteers called Betty, who helps to cook and serve Mary's Meals, told us, 'these children are mine and I have to give my best to love them and care for them'.

"We are determined to keep our promise to the 1,257,278 children around the world who rely on Mary's Meals. With more hungry children arriving at schools in South Sudan each day, we also need your help to meet the growing demand there.

"With your support, we hope to ensure that every new child enrolling at schools in South Sudan already serving Mary's Meals can receive a daily meal and, as funds allow, also expand our programme to reach 1,657 additional children at five new schools in the country. We can do this with your help, while continuing to expand our programme around the world to reach many more children. I want to thank with all my heart those who are supporting our

mission at this time of great need. Together, we can save lives and bring hope to innocent children caught up in terrible crisis.”

Through the Crisis in South Sudan campaign, the charity is appealing for support to ensure it can keep its promise to the children who already depend on its school feeding programme, and as funds allow, expand to reach even more.

Visit [relevant affiliate website] to donate or to find out more about how Mary's Meals is helping children living in some of South Sudan's most vulnerable and chronically food-insecure areas.

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## Notes to editors

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- Additional images are available upon request.
- Mary's Meals is a simple idea that works. The charity provides one daily meal in a place of learning in order to attract chronically poor children into the classroom, where they receive an education that can, in the future, be their ladder out of poverty.
- Mary's Meals feeds 1,257,278 hungry children every school day across four continents, in 15 countries including Malawi, Liberia, Kenya, Syria, Zambia, Haiti, Uganda, South Sudan, Thailand, India and Ethiopia.
- The average global cost to feed a child with Mary's Meals for a whole school year is just £13.90 / \$19.50 / €15.60. At schools in South Sudan, children are served a nutritious school meal of maize or sorghum with beans.
- In addition to continuing to feed the hundreds of thousands of children who already depend on its global school feeding programme, Mary's Meals is urgently appealing for supporters to help the charity:
  - Keep the promise of a nutritious daily school meal to the 20,520 children already receiving Mary's Meals in South Sudan
  - Expand its existing feeding programme – as funds allow – to ensure that every new child enrolling at the 40 schools which already serve Mary's Meals in South Sudan can enjoy a daily school meal
  - Expand its school feeding programme – as funds allow – to reach desperately hungry children at five new schools in South Sudan with life-changing daily school meals
- The Mary's Meals campaign was born in 2002 when Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow visited Malawi during a famine and met a mother dying from AIDS. When Magnus asked her eldest son Edward what his dreams were in life, he replied simply: “I want to have enough food to eat and to go to school one day.”
- Mary's Meals is committed to spending at least 93% of donations directly on its charitable activities. This is only possible because most of the charity's work is done by an army of dedicated volunteers – including more than 80,000 in Malawi alone.
- Independently verified research from Malawi, Liberia and Zambia shows that in schools where Mary's Meals are served, hunger is reduced, enrolment increases, attendance improves, drop-out rates fall, absences dwindle, concentration in lessons is heightened, attainment levels increase, parents are less anxious and children are happier.
- Please visit [www.marysmeals.org.uk](http://www.marysmeals.org.uk) to find out more about the work of Mary's Meals.

## Media contacts

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