

Introduction and contents

This 'key messages' document sets out the main facts we wish to communicate when raising awareness about Mary's Meals around the world. This includes our core and secondary organisational messages, as well as some useful external statistics and key Mary's Meals impact findings. For more in-depth information about each of our programmes and the contexts in which they operate, please refer to our [Global Programmes Overview](#).

This document is produced and updated by the MMI Communications team. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please email Editorial Manager, Jane James (Jane.James@marysmeals.org).

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1. Our core messages

- Mary's Meals is a simple idea that works. By providing a daily meal in a place of education, Mary's Meals encourages children experiencing poverty and hunger into the classroom where they gain a basic education that can provide an escape route from poverty.
- Our vision is that every child receives one daily meal in their place of education and that all those who have more than they need, share with those who lack even the most basic things.
- Our mission is to enable people to offer their money, goods, skills, time, or prayer, and through this involvement, provide the most effective help to those suffering the effects of extreme poverty in areas of great need around the world.
- The global average cost to provide a child with Mary's Meals for a whole school year is just £19.15 (GBP) / €22 (EUR) / \$25.20 USD.¹
- The worldwide cost per meal is 10p GBP / 11c EUR / 13c USD.
- Mary's Meals serves nutritious meals to more than 3 million children² every school day in 16 countries, across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean.
- Mary's Meals increases school enrolment and improves school attendance. In schools where our meals are served, far fewer children leave school early because of hunger.
- We are determined to keep our promise of a nutritious daily meal in school to those children who are already part of our global school feeding programme and – as funds allow – reach the next child waiting for Mary's Meals.
- Mary's Meals is a global, grassroots movement;³ an intrinsic part of our work is to involve as many people as possible, recognising that each of us has a unique part to play in this mission.
- Without passionate, motivated volunteers, Mary's Meals cannot function.
- Local communities own and run Mary's Meals in the countries where the programme operates. Across our programme countries, tens of thousands of volunteer cooks give their time to prepare and serve meals to children from their own community.
- Wherever possible, our meals are made with locally sourced food, thereby supporting the local economy.

¹ The global cost-per-child in Australian dollars is \$34.80 AUD, Bosnia-Herzegovina marks is 42 BAM, Canadian dollars is \$31.70 CAD, Czech koruna is 550 CZK, Polish zloty is 92.40 PLN, and Swiss francs is 24.50 CHF.

² In line with our new approach of using rounded numbers, please use 'more than 3 million children' wherever possible in your communications.

³ Please note that the word 'movement' has a specific meaning within Catholic discourse, so it may be more appropriate to refer to Mary's Meals as a global community when addressing faith audiences.

2. Our secondary messages

- Mary's Meals grew out of a charity called Scottish International Relief (SIR), which was set up after Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow and his brother Fergus took aid from their home in Argyll to Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 1992 at a time when a brutal war raged in the wider region.
- The global 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 he asked her eldest son, Edward, what his dreams were in life, he replied simply: "To have enough food to eat and to be able to go to school one day."
- The first ever Mary's Meals were served to children in January 2003 in Chilomoni Primary School and Chipini Primary School, Malawi. For more detail, please read Chapter 7 of Magnus' book, *The Shed That Fed A Million Children / The Shed That Fed 2 Million Children*.
- The work of Mary's Meals grew out of Medjugorje – the small town in Bosnia-Herzegovina where it is claimed the Virgin Mary has been appearing since 1981 – and Craig Lodge. Craig Lodge Family House of Prayer is the Catholic retreat centre that the MacFarlane-Barrow family were inspired to open after a trip to Medjugorje in 1983.
- Mary's Meals is named after Mary, the mother of Jesus, who brought up her own child in poverty.
- Mary's Meals consists of, respects, and reaches out to people of all faiths and none.
- We have a commitment to keeping our running costs low and we ensure at least 93% of donations are spent on our charitable activities.
- Mary's Meals operates its international headquarters from a shed in a remote part of the Scottish Highlands – the same shed where donations were first collected in 1992.
- For many children, the school meal they receive through Mary's Meals may be the only meal they will have that day.
- Mary's Meals is independent of, but co-operates with, government bodies in the countries in which it operates.
- In schools where our daily meals are served, hunger is reduced, enrolment increases, attendance improves, drop-out rates fall, absences dwindle, concentration in lessons is heightened, participation levels increase, communities worry less about children being hungry, and children are happier.
- Our school feeding programmes encourage all children to attend school. Girls make up around 50% of children across our programmes globally.
- Feed a School is Mary's Meals' flagship fundraising project, which invites grassroots supporters and groups to commit to feeding all the children at a named school in Malawi or Zambia for an entire school year.

3. Key facts from external sources

- There are 78 million children of primary school age (about 6 to 11 years) who are out of school.

[Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2025, SDG4 scorecard progress report on national benchmarks: focus on the out-of-school rate – [SDG 4 Scorecard \(unesco.org\)](#)]

- Only 27% of schoolchildren in low-income countries benefit from school meals.

[Source: WFP, 2025 – [State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024 \(wfp.org\)](#)]

- Nearly half of deaths among children under five years of age are linked to undernutrition. The developmental, economic, social and medical impacts of the global burden of malnutrition are serious and lasting, for individuals and their families, for communities and for countries.

[Source: World Health Organisation, Malnutrition fact sheet 2024 – [Malnutrition \(who.int\)](#)]

- In 2024, 150.2 million children under five years of age were too short for their age (stunting) and 42.8 million were too thin for their height (wasting).

[Source: World Health Organisation 2025 – [Joint child malnutrition estimates \(who.int\)](#)]

- 333 million children worldwide are living in extreme poverty. Nearly 90% of children caught in extreme poverty reside in either sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia.

[Source: United Nations, 2023 – [UN News](#)]

- Across the globe, around 733 million people are facing hunger. Equivalent to one in 11 people globally and one in five in Africa.

[Source: World Health Organization 2024 – [The State of Food Insecurity and Nutrition in the World, 2024 \(who.int\)](#)]

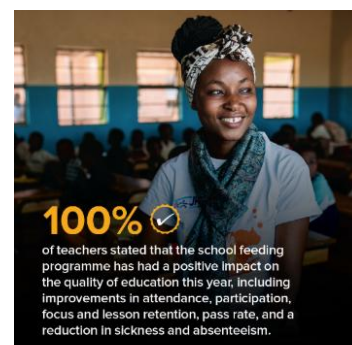
4. Our ongoing impact research

For over two decades, Mary's Meals has been dedicated to addressing children's immediate need for food while enabling them to gain an education that can offer a pathway out of poverty – not only for themselves but for future generations.

We are committed to studying the impact of our work to help us learn and adapt while ensuring the voices of the children who receive our meals and those who actively participate in our school feeding programmes are at the heart of our pursuit for excellence. We collect data on core indicators including attendance and enrolment, as well as key factors affecting wellbeing and children's readiness to learn such as hunger reduction, energy levels, and active participation in class. In addition to ongoing research in schools where our school feeding programme is well established, we collect comparative data from expansion schools before and after our meals are introduced. Recent research has also touched on the benefits of school feeding at a household level.

When citing any of the impact statements below or from our annual impact reports, please always remember to include the corresponding footnote and/or reference the report.

[Click here](#) to find our most recent impact reports and a selection of visuals to support our impact results on the National Affiliate hub.



Mary's Meals, Internal annual impact studies for Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, and Zambia (2024)

Reducing child hunger / giving children energy

- **Across Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, and Zambia, 74% of children surveyed felt hungry before the meal. This dropped to 1% after the meal.**

[Source: Mary's Meals 2024 Annual Impact Report]

- **Only 2% of the teachers we spoke to in Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, and Zambia told us that children in their classroom had high energy levels before the meal. This increased to 98% after the meal was served.**

[Source: Mary's Meals 2024 Annual Impact Report]

- **In South Sudan, 83% of children felt hungry every school day before the programme began. This dropped to 5% after they began receiving Mary's Meals.**

[Source: Mary's Meals 2024 Annual Impact Report]

- **In Mozambique, 100% of teachers reported that once the children started receiving a school meal, their energy levels in class were 'high' or 'very high'.**

[Source: MSLI Expansion Comparative (Impact) Summary Sheet, 2024]

Improving child wellbeing at school

- **In Malawi, 94% of children (94% of boys and 93% of girls) reported that they feel 'happy' or 'very happy' at school.**

[Source: Mary's Meals Malawi Impact Summary, 2024]

- **In Mozambique, 92% of children reported that they never worry about hunger after they began receiving meals.**

[Source: MSLI Expansion Comparative (Impact) Summary Sheet, 2024]

Helping more children access school

- **In 2024, the average monthly school attendance rate was 89%.**

[Source: Mary's Meals 2024 Annual Impact Report]

- **In 2024, across our expansion schools in Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Sudan, and Zambia, school enrolment increased by 10% after the school feeding programme began.**

[Source: Mary's Meals 2024 Annual Impact Report]

More children engaging in school and more children progressing through school

- **Across Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, and Zambia, 35% of children surveyed felt that they could concentrate well before the meal was served. This increased to 98% after they had eaten.**

[Source: Mary's Meals 2024 Annual Impact Report]

- **In Zambia, before the school feeding programme, 37% of teachers said children had good concentration levels in class. This increased to 100% following the meals.**

[Source: Mary's Meals 2024 Annual Impact Report]

Benefits at household and community level

(Results from Madagascar research published in our 2023 Annual Impact Report)

- **Improved food security:** parents worry less from Monday to Friday because they know children will eat at school, therefore are sometimes able to share household food with those who have less.
- **More flexibility in economic resources:** school feeding programmes allow parents to redirect household supplies to other needs.
- **Increased availability for work:** parents do not have to return home during the day to provide a lunch for school-going children.