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Mary's Meals School Feeding Reduces Child Hunger and Promotes Access to Education

2023 Annual Impact Report reveals multiple benefits for children's health and education in countries facing acute and crisis levels of food insecurity.

Bloomfield, N.J. – July 30, 2024 – Global school-feeding charity Mary's Meals has released its [2023 Annual Impact Report](#), showing a direct correlation between its school-feeding programs and positive outcomes for children in their overall health and educational development.

The report spans four African countries: Liberia, Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe, where Mary's Meals supports feeding programs for 683,000 children every school day. The assessments examined the program's impacts on children by interviewing students and collecting teacher and parent perspectives. In all, 3,100 children, more than 300 teachers and 80 parents participated to present an overview of the effect of meals on school enrollment and attendance, children's health and education, and the socio-economic benefits for families and communities.

"This multi-country impact report underscores the vital link between meals at school and the growth and educational progression of children in Mary's Meals programs. It's rewarding to see such positive results, particularly in countries affected by food insecurity and education gaps. It also demonstrates the important role school feeding plays in supporting children and their families," said Mary's Meals USA Executive Director, Terry Bonet.

Children often bear the burden of poverty, hunger and lost education. Current figures estimate that 67 million children are out of school, half of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. By feeding children where they learn, Mary's Meals addresses the immediate need for food and access to education. Across Mary's Meals feeding programs, daily meals have proven to be the catalyst for children to attend school, as confirmed by the report. The average monthly attendance rate was 88%, with a steady increase in school enrollment over the past three years.

The 2023 Annual Impact Report shows that teachers believe daily meals lead to social interaction and active class participation, improved performance, confidence and lesson retention, decreased absenteeism and progression through school. Further, teachers also believe that meals support children staying in school for their primary education.

The report highlighted several positive results from the feeding programs. With a daily meal, 84% of children never left school early because of hunger, and 99% of teachers stated that meals reduced the number of children dropping out. The report also noted that school feeding increased children's ability to focus, participate and learn. Before a meal, 36% of children felt they could concentrate well; this increased to 98% after eating.

The unique feeding model in which Mary's Meals collaborates with local communities to source, prepare and serve meals, also promotes community cohesion and strong relationships. The report clearly showed school meals to be fundamental to children's growth, learning and health while providing an important social safety net for families and contributing to community well-being.

Last year, school meals were added as an official indicator to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education. This signals global recognition of school meals as a key intervention to improve education access and ensure inclusive and effective learning environments. SDG 4 is one of 17 Sustainable Development Goals that comprise the [2030 Agenda](#), which is a plan of action for people, prosperity and the planet.

“One of the beauties of Mary’s Meals is that it has this immediate impact of feeding a child who is hungry. At the same time, by enabling that child to come into the classroom and gain that education, it changes so many other things in the long term. We see huge increases in enrollment wherever we start Mary’s Meals. We also see improvements in attendance rates and academic performance. We see fewer children dropping out of school because of hunger. We even see more community cohesiveness with community members volunteering their time and raising the status of the school. That meal does so many different things, and our latest report is testament to this,” said Mary’s Meals Founder and CEO, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow.

The 2023 Mary’s Meals [Annual Impact Report](#) can be found at www.marysmealsusa.org.

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About Mary’s Meals

Now in its 22nd year, [Mary’s Meals](#) is a global movement that sets up school-feeding programs in some of the world’s most vulnerable communities, where conflict, poverty and hunger often prevent children from gaining an education. Mary’s Meals works with in-country volunteers to provide one daily nutritious meal in a place of learning to attract children into the classroom to receive an education. This simple solution to help end world hunger also enables children to lift themselves from the cycle of hunger and poverty.

Mary’s Meals began by feeding 200 children in Malawi in 2002. Today, the organization feeds 2,429,182 hungry children every school day in more than 5,000 schools in the following countries: Benin, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Mary’s Meals is part of the global School Meals Coalition, an emerging initiative of governments and partners to drive actions that can urgently reestablish, improve, and scale up food and education systems. For more information about Mary’s Meals, visit marysmealsusa.org.

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