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School Meals Are a Lifeline for Children in Countries Facing Acute Food Insecurity

Mary's Meals operating in 10 of 18 hunger hotspots listed in the recent FAO-WFP report.

Bloomfield, N.J. – August 5, 2024 – Global school-feeding charity Mary's Meals is ramping up its efforts in countries where urgent action is needed to protect lives and livelihoods and where pre-school and primary school-age children are at risk of stopping their education because of hunger.

Mary's Meals serves vital school meals to more than 1.8 million children every school day in 10 of the countries identified as hunger hotspots for the outlook period of June through October 2024 by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the World Food Programme (WFP): Haiti, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Malawi, Mozambique, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP Early Warnings on Food Insecurity [report](#) reveals that acute food insecurity in 18 places is projected to increase in scale and severity over the next few months, pushing populations into crisis and emergency levels of acute food insecurity, with some at risk of famine. Key drivers of food insecurity in these areas include conflict and displacement, interrupted food production, and economic and climate shocks.

[School meals](#) are a critical and pragmatic [strategy](#) to tackle hunger and education crises and often serve as lifelines for children living in extremely vulnerable circumstances. The organization's school-feeding program has grown exponentially in Ethiopia's northern region of Tigray since the beginning of the year and now reaches more than 110,000 children. In Haiti, Mary's Meals and its trusted partner are working around the clock to maintain school feeding amid violence and unrest. In Mozambique, the charity expanded its work there for the first time in May to bring hope to thousands of children on the front line of climate change.

Mary's Meals Founder and CEO, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, said, "Today, the appalling food crises unfolding in Tigray, Haiti, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Yemen, and so many more suffering nations around the world, might lead us to feelings of despair, anger or a sense of being overwhelmed by it all. All are reasonable when we look at the scale of human suffering today. I hope we never lose a sense of outrage that any person or child in this world of plenty would face death by starvation. But what we do with these feelings – and the action they prompt – is ultimately what matters most, and our actions do make a difference. Mary's Meals works. We have the evidence, and that can only add to our burning desire to reach the children still waiting."

"At the heart of the immense suffering caused by hunger around the world are children, the very youngest in society, who are silently paying the highest price. School-feeding programs can be incredibly effective tools not only to alleviate immediate hunger among children but to promote access to education and help to break the cycle of poverty, paving the way for brighter futures for entire communities. Even when focusing on the complexities of the issue of hunger in hand, it's important to remember that children just want to be children – and meals served in school give them that chance," said Mary's Meals International's Director of Program Development & Operations, Erin Pratley PhD.

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 and trusted partners to provide one daily nutritious meal in a place of learning to bring 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 more than 2.4 million 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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