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Alarming Levels of Hunger, Interrupted Education and Poverty Illustrate the Urgent Need for School Feeding

Mary's Meals Meets the Need for Food and Education Access for Millions of Children.

Bloomfield, N.J. – October 9, 2024 – World Food Day on October 16 and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on October 17, respectively, highlight the founding of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to achieve food security and promote an understanding of people living in poverty. Both days draw attention to the global issues of food insecurity and poverty and emphasize the need for immediate action.

Globally, alarming numbers of people face hunger, disrupted education, and poverty. Estimates show 309 [million](#) people face acute hunger, 250 [million](#) children are out of school, and 712 [million people](#)—nearly 9% of the world's population—live in extreme poverty on less than \$2.15 a day.

More than ever, school feeding must be urgently prioritized and implemented to address child hunger and malnutrition, foster healthy growth, enable education, and support local communities to build more sustainable societies. School meals—added last year as an indicator to Quality Education—meet the immediate need for food and access to education and contribute to efforts to achieve Zero Hunger, No Poverty, and [Quality Education](#), three of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that comprise the U.N. 2030 [Agenda](#).

“Many children in countries where Mary's Meals operates experience acute hunger, malnutrition, and have to drop out of school to find food. By collaborating with communities, we're able to implement a simple but cost-effective school feeding program that integrates local cultural needs and adapts to changing situations to ensure sustainable delivery of healthy meals. Our impact research shows our simple solution for child hunger works,” said Mary's Meals founder and CEO Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow.

Currently, Mary's Meals provides meals to more than 2.4 million children in 5,000 schools across 17 countries. Children may attend school for meals but stay for education, which can help break the chronic cycle of poverty and hunger. A [2023 Impact Report](#) across four countries, including Liberia, Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe, where Mary's Meals collectively supports feeding programs for 683,000 children every school day, demonstrates the significant link between school meals and the positive growth and educational progression of children.

In countries facing conflict and displacement, extreme weather events and climate change, and economic shocks, school meals provide a lifeline for vulnerable children and their families, who often bear the outsized impact of poverty.

“It's been said that a hungry child doesn't have ears to listen. How can any part of the human family make progress if its children are without adequate food and access to at least a basic education?” asked MacFarlane-Barrow.

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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 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 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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