

International School Feeding Organization Mary's Meals Enables Education As a Basic Human Right

Bloomfield, N.J. – January 22, 2024 – On January 24, International Day of Education, the United Nations (U.N.) underscores education as a fundamental human right and celebrates its role for peace and development. Quality Education is one of 17 global goals that comprise the U.N. [2030 Agenda](#), a plan of action for people, prosperity and the planet.

Globally, almost [700 million](#) people live in extreme poverty—on less than \$2.15 per day—but education is a critical tool that can help break the chronic cycle of poverty and hunger. By offering a daily meal at school, children are encouraged to attend, gaining access to education while receiving the vital nutrition they need to be healthy, focus, and learn effectively.

For 22 years, international school feeding organization Mary's Meals has worked alongside communities to provide daily meals in a place of education for children living in extreme poverty in areas where hunger often creates a barrier to learning. Reaching almost 2.5 million children in 16 countries with much-needed meals every school day, Mary's Meals mobilizes communities to run the feeding programs.

“Mary's Meals knows that school feeding programs support educational achievement. Our research across multiple countries shows the positive results of feeding children where they learn. By offering healthy meals, these programs not only draw children to school but support their physical, cognitive and educational development, allowing them to focus on learning and realize their full potential,” said Mary's Meals USA Executive Director, Terry Bonet.

Recently, the World Food Programme [said](#) 343 million people were experiencing acute food insecurity, and, as of 2023, UNESCO estimated [250 million children](#) were out of school.

School meals are lifelines for children who often bear the disproportionate effects of poverty, hunger, and disrupted education—especially in regions affected by conflict, climate crises, and economic or political instability. In these urgent contexts, a school meal may be the only food a child receives in a day, while the school provides education and fosters social connection.

Recognizing the crucial role school meals play in children's health and educational progress, in 2023, they were officially included as an indicator under U.N. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education. Food is a key intervention to enhance access to education and ensure inclusive, effective learning environments for all children.

An education empowers children to shape their futures, contribute to their communities, and drive lasting positive change.

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