



Mary's Meals

Monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy

2018-2020



DEVELOPING OUR 2018-2020 MEL STRATEGY

Our 2014-2017 monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) strategy introduced our theory of change and newly-agreed organisational outcomes, along with a range of key indicators which we planned to assess. This first organisational MEL strategy formalised, strengthened and expanded the consistent monitoring of Mary's Meals programmes, and established overarching outcomes which could be applied to all our school feeding programmes in a range of contexts.

As part of this, we established core indicators – which are now used as standard – and began a series of longitudinal research projects to assess the impact of our programmes in Malawi, Zambia and Liberia, publishing our first [Malawi Impact Assessment report](#) in 2016. This new research is providing enhanced knowledge and understanding of our programmes, which we are using in a range of different ways. Our impact assessments have demonstrated the impact of our programmes across a range of outcomes, including hunger, access, engagement, progression, child wellbeing, community involvement and support for education. They also highlight areas where change can be harder to measure or to attribute to our programmes.

Learning from the implementation of our first MEL strategy has enabled us to further understand, develop and refine our programmes in different contexts, to introduce new programme delivery processes, and to access further funding to allow Mary's Meals to support more vulnerable children through school feeding.

This 2018-2020 MEL strategy continues our efforts to monitor and measure the impact that our programmes are having around the world. We will continue to base our approach on the themes of participation, learning, accountability, efficiency and distinctiveness, as we continue to strive to deliver the most effective programmes for the children and communities we support. Sixteen years after Mary's Meals first began feeding children at one school in Malawi, our MEL strategy continues to build on the wealth of organisational learning and experience we have gained in delivering highly effective school feeding programmes, now feeding more than one million children every school day.

This paper sets out Mary's Meals' global monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy for 2018-2020, detailing our updated theory of change and corresponding core outcomes and indicators. It provides an overview of additional research we may undertake and plans around the practicalities of implementing this refined new strategy. The strategy has been developed on the basis of consultation with a range of stakeholders and staff from across the organisation, and has been approved by the Mary's Meals International Board.





THE MARY'S MEALS THEORY OF CHANGE

Our theory of change describes how our programmes work to bring about change in the lives of vulnerable children and their communities. Each theme in the theory of change is monitored by a range of indicators.

During 2018-2020, we will continue to monitor our success in achieving our organisational outcomes as set out in our theory of change. These have been refined and updated, building on our learning from the 2014-2017 MEL strategy.

This 2018-2020 MEL strategy includes a focus on the overarching impact to which Mary's Meals aims to contribute: namely, that **children gain an education that provides an escape route from poverty for them and for future generations**. While our programme purpose and design – providing a daily meal for children in a place of education, relieving immediate hunger – remains unchanged, we have redesigned our outcomes to acknowledge the key importance of this overarching impact in bringing about long-term, sustainable change. Our new set of outcomes emphasize early access to education, continued progress through school, and achievement. We also stress the importance of community involvement in and support for education.

Another significant change is the introduction of outcomes relating to school feeding for pre-school children. We recognise the importance of pre-school education for children's emotional, social and cognitive development and their readiness for primary school. While our programmes have supported early childhood development (ECD) centres across multiple countries for many years, we have not previously had organisational outcomes relating to ECD and have only been able to conduct specific research within our Malawi ECD programme. This strategy introduces a specific outcome on pre-school education, as well as including the impact for pre-school children alongside primary school children across other outcomes.

We have also moved from having five 'short-term' outcomes and three 'longer-term' outcomes to having nine outcomes which are not categorised by time period. This recognises the holistic impact of our programmes across nine equally-weighted outcomes. Our organisational impact and outcomes are set out in our Theory of Change diagram.

The Mary's Meals THEORY OF CHANGE

Mary's Meals learns from and demonstrates impact, continuously refining its school feeding model.

Mary's Meals enables 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.

Mary's Meals engages communities and makes a long-term commitment to support schools.

Mary's Meals sets up school feeding projects in some of the world's poorest communities, where poverty and hunger prevent children from gaining an education.

Mary's Meals provides resources, including food, equipment and volunteer training, to establish and effectively implement its school feeding model.

School feeding programmes are delivered collaboratively between local communities, schools and Mary's Meals.

Community volunteers manage and deliver school feeding programmes on a daily basis.

Children receive a daily meal in their place of education.

Child hunger at school and pre-school is reduced.

More children access school and pre-school education.

Child health and well-being at school and pre-school improves.

More children engage in school and pre-school education.

Pre-school children are better prepared for primary school.

Community ownership of and engagement in each school feeding programme increases.

More children progress within school and pre-school education.

The value placed on education by communities increases.

Mary's Meals influences and encourages others to contribute to, support, take ownership of, and replicate effective school feeding programmes.

Children gain an education that provides an escape route from poverty for them and for future generations.



Mary's Meals' impact and organisational outcomes

Mary's Meals' overarching aim is that children will gain an education that provides an escape route from poverty for them and for future generations. We believe that supporting children's educational progress and achievement, through the provision of one daily meal in a place of education, is central to the transformational power of education. Children who progress through education are more likely to be able to support themselves and their families in future, which in turn contributes to the growth and development of their country.

Our organisational outcomes are intended to contribute to this long-term aim. These outcomes are set out below. For each of these outcomes, we have defined a number of indicators which we will use to assess our progress.

Outcome 1. Child hunger at school and pre-school is reduced.

- 1.1 Number of children receiving a daily meal at school
- 1.2 Percentage of school days the school feeding programme is delivered as planned
- 1.3 Average percentage change in levels of classroom hunger reported by children
- 1.4 Average percentage change in levels of classroom hunger reported by teachers

Outcome 2. More children access school and pre-school education.

- 2.1 Change in enrolment rate, disaggregated by gender
- 2.2 Percentage change in number of children out of school in the local community reported by children, teachers or parents/guardians

Outcome 3. Child health and well-being at school and pre-school improves.

- 3.1 Percentage change in children reporting that they feel happy at school
- 3.2 Percentage change in children reporting anxiety due to classroom hunger
- 3.3 Levels of child participation in after-school activities and play

Outcome 4. More children engage in school and pre-school education.

- 4.1 Percentage attendance rate, disaggregated by gender
- 4.2 Percentage change in teachers saying that average daily attendance in their class is more than 70%
- 4.3 Percentage change in absence due to hunger reported by children, teachers or parents/guardians
- 4.4 Percentage change in children leaving early during the school day reported by children and teachers
- 4.5 Percentage change in children leaving early during the school day due to hunger reported by children and teachers
- 4.6 Percentage change in children reporting difficulty in concentrating or joining in lessons at school

Outcome 5. Pre-school children are better prepared for primary school.

- 5.1 Percentage of children completing pre-school supported by Mary's Meals
- 5.2 Percentage of teachers reporting strong engagement/participation in class among children who attended pre-schools supported by Mary's Meals

Outcome 6. Community ownership of and engagement in each school feeding programme increases.

- 6.1 Number of volunteers who have participated in Mary's Meals training
- 6.2 Number of schools with an active school feeding committee/Parent Teacher Association

6.3 Volunteer participation in delivering the school feeding programme (number of volunteer days per school per week)

Outcome 7. More children progress within school and pre-school education.

7.1 Percentage annual change in absolute numbers of children progressing between grades

7.2 Percentage completion rate of students enrolled in the final available grade of primary school, disaggregated by gender

7.3 Percentage of teachers reporting positive change in pupils' grades

7.4 Percentage change in numbers of children dropping out of school

Outcome 8. The value placed on education by communities increases.

8.1 Percentage of parents/guardians who began volunteering at school once the Mary's Meals' programme had been introduced

8.2 Percentage change in teachers reporting that parents discuss their children's education with them

Outcome 9. Mary's Meals influences and encourages others to contribute to, support, take ownership of, and replicate effective school feeding programmes.

9.1 Percentage of schools which receive contributions to the programme from local communities, disaggregated by country

9.2 Percentage of government employees who have participated in annual training who report improved understanding of the Mary's Meals school feeding model

The above is the list of indicators that we intend to collect as standard in all of our impact assessment research. We may also collect additional information to complement the indicators on this list, as the implementation of our MEL strategy continues to grow and develop.

Learning and feedback from our staff and supporters suggests that our programmes can have a range of other significant impacts in addition to these outcomes. These vary between contexts, and can include: benefits to the environment or the local economy, wider benefits to children's health and nutrition, and benefits in terms of community relationships and peace-building within communities. While these impacts and others, which our staff and supporters have repeatedly reported, remain important to us, our primary research focus is on the direct impact on the nine outcomes detailed above. However, we will continue to remain open and welcoming to opportunities which allow us to research areas which complement our theory of change.

MARY'S MEALS' MEL PROGRAMME 2018-2020

Our MEL programme for 2018-2020 will continue to combine ongoing, regular monitoring of our programme activities and outputs with long-term impact assessment and other research. This combination of timely, regular monitoring data along with complex impact assessment will support, learning and improvements to our model, as well as informing decision making and allowing us to communicate our impacts effectively with our supporters and staff.

Ongoing monitoring

Mary's Meals will continue to ensure the regular monitoring of specific indicators relating to needs analysis, inputs and activities. These allow us to continually understand the current context of our work, assess new areas for expansion, and track the delivery of our programmes throughout the logistics chain, from supplier to school. This ongoing monitoring helps us to ensure that we are meeting our high standards of efficiency and effectiveness.

During 2018-2020, we will also continue to make improvements in our processes for collection and quality control of the data, and we will review how our monitoring data is stored and accessed.

Impact assessment 2018-2020

In addition to our ongoing monitoring, we will continue to undertake long-term impact assessment in key programme countries, assessing the impact of our programme against our indicators as follows:

- Indicators relating to primary school children

In Malawi, Zambia and Liberia, where our externally-verified¹, large-scale, quasi-experimental impact assessments are already underway, these will be assessed for primary school children through a continuation of this research, as follows:

Malawi – completion of five-year impact assessment, which began in October 2014.

Zambia – completion of five-year impact assessment, which began in February 2015.

Liberia – completion of five-year impact assessment, which began in April 2016.

We will also consider options for continuing this impact assessment research in Malawi, Zambia and Liberia in different formats once the full impact assessment projects have been completed.

In addition to this, Mary's Meals Kenya will begin new research at primary schools where our school feeding programmes have been operating for several years, assessing the impact of our programmes against our indicators. In other countries, we will further develop our work in assessing impact through our partner programmes, conducting detailed baseline work for new projects or expansions with partner organisations and considering options for context-specific research, such as on our work with marginalised children in India or in rural Haiti.

- Indicators relating to pre-school children

Mary's Meals provides a daily meal to children at pre-school in many of the countries in which we work. In many cases, the pre-schools are co-located with primary schools, and we also support specific early childhood development programmes. During the period of this strategy we will therefore begin to roll out analysis of indicators relating to pre-school children at our

¹ Our impact assessment work is being externally verified by INTRAC – www.intrac.org.

specific early childhood development programmes and also consider options for conducting specific pieces of research, looking at indicators relating to school feeding and early childhood development.

Implementation

Implementation of the strategy will include a continued emphasis on building the capacity of our MEL teams in country, which has grown and developed significantly since the 2014-2017 strategy was implemented. The aim within this strategic period is that MMI should continue to train and support both Programme Affiliate staff and partner organisations to enable them to conduct research, assess results and report on findings as much as possible, producing their own learning and recommendations.

Our data will continue to be disaggregated by grade and gender and will continue to support our efforts to reach the most marginalised children, recognising the importance of our school feeding programmes for all children.

Building research partnerships

We recognise that there is considerable scope to work with external researchers and research institutions to further our understanding of Mary's Meals' impacts. Between 2018-2020, we will seek to build a small number of research partnerships with institutions and individuals, where we believe this can help us in achieving our aims. These partnerships will support our core efforts in impact assessment – for example by providing additional capacity for data analysis or targeted research – as well as bringing new insight into areas which are important to us but fall outside of our core impact assessment.

Learning and accountability

Mary's Meals is committed to being a learning organisation. Between 2018-2020, we will continue to review how we use the data gathered to improve our systems and processes. We will maintain an emphasis on listening to the children and communities we work with and on ensuring that the requests we make of individuals, communities and schools to participate in research are fair, and that their participation is beneficial and valued.

Where possible, we will draw on relevant wider data, research and learning, gathered either by ourselves or by other organisations. We will make best possible use of the data we collect, ensuring that the results are analysed, reported and discussed internally, within our programme teams in particular, to aid and improve our programmes. Relevant results and learning will also be shared and reviewed with our partners, and will be used to support growth and strengthening of our partner-led programmes. Finally, we will contribute to wider learning in the sector, by making our own research and learning publicly available, and by working with others to support wider research engagement with our programme.

Communicating our impact

Mary's Meals is committed to publishing the results of our impact assessments. This is part of our accountability to our supporters as well as to the children and families we support. We will seek opportunities to communicate about our impact and learning to different audiences, and work to make information about our results accessible and engaging for our stakeholders.

Summary and timeline for implementation

