

CONTACT:

Helena Finnegan
Mary's Meals USA Communications Manager
helena.finnegan@marysmeals.org
239-290-7788

Mary's Meals Expands School Feeding Program in Drought-Stricken Turkana, Kenya

International School Feeding Charity Feeds an Additional 60,000 Children.



Feeding expansion enables 60,000 more children to have a meal and learn in 171 primary schools.

Bloomfield, N.J. – December 1, 2022 – International school feeding charity Mary's Meals is expanding its school feeding program to provide more life changing meals in the drought-stricken Turkana region of Kenya, where famine remains a threat.

Since 2005, Mary's Meals Kenya has served 91,000 meals to preschool age children in 675 Early Childhood Development and Education Centers (ECDEs) in the Uasin Gishu, Kisii and Turkana counties. Until recently, this program did not include primary schools in Turkana.

Now, the successful ECDE school feeding model has been introduced into primary schools in Turkana. As a result, an additional 60,000 children ages five and up in 171 schools will benefit from a daily meal in their place of education. Mary's Meals is delivering the enhanced program in partnership with local communities, and volunteers – often parents of the school children – who take turns cooking and serving the meals with guidance and support from the charity.

News of the expansion is welcome for the people of Turkana. This semi-arid region is experiencing its worst drought in 40 years and a fourth failed rainy season is causing crop failure and low-yield harvests. The resulting food insecurity means children rely on these daily school meals to survive.

Mary's Meals Founder and CEO, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, stated, "The situation in Turkana is truly awful. The drought means that people's animals are dying and they are understandably concerned that their children will be next. Children are facing starvation and a meal in school can be the difference between eating nothing and something in a day."

For years, Mary's Meals Kenya worked to feed as many children as possible, but reaching those in primary schools remained a challenge. Competing priorities in the education sector meant that many schools were unable to receive food; this had a direct impact on education. Before primary school feeding, hungry children were struggling to learn or to attend school. The people of the community referred to this as, "no smoke, no school."

It is expected school enrollment will increase significantly with the introduction of meals in 171 places of primary stage learning. Working in close consultation with the Kenyan Ministry of Education and with the firm support of local communities, Mary's Meals is ensuring that children attend classes where they will receive a nutritious meal and an education that can help break the cycle of poverty.

With the inclusion of Turkana primary schools to its current school feeding program, Mary's Meals Kenya now provides meals to 151,000 children ages 3-18 years old in 846 schools.

Amina Swedi, country director of Mary's Meals Kenya, said, "This is just a start...this is the number we're starting with (60,000 children across 171 primary schools). But I know, once the word goes around, and children go and tell their friends, and parents tell other parents that school feeding is happening, this enrollment is going to go up and we will reach even more children, but even right now it's still very impactful."

Swedi is also clear on the immediate impact the program will have. She added, "The biggest impact is going to be the happiness, the smiling! In children's faces, you'll be able to see it. And that is the biggest impact. You will see hope on their faces once they start receiving these meals and they see it's consistent. They have received this type of meal before, but it has not been constant. So, for us, because we are consistent and here for the long term, it will be wonderful to see that, even after a year or two years, the hope and the smiles are not fading away."

MacFarlane-Barrow shared, "We're rejoicing that we can finally see 60,000 primary school children across the county receiving these life saving meals along with those we were already reaching in preschools, but there are so many children still hungry. The current food crisis is the worst we've seen and we fully expect more children to start coming to school because there's now food there."

— END —

About Mary's Meals

[Mary's Meals](#) is a global movement that 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 works with in-country volunteers to provide one daily meal in a place of learning to attract chronically poor children into the classroom, where they receive an education that can be their ladder out of poverty. Mary's Meals began by feeding just 200 children in Malawi in 2002.

Today, the organization feeds 2,279,941 hungry children every school day across five continents, in the following countries: Benin, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Myanmar, Niger, Romania, South Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Mary's Meals collaborates with the U.N. World Food Program and is part of the global School Meals Coalition, an emerging initiative of governments and partners to drive actions that can urgently re-establish, improve, and scale up food and education systems.

For more information about Mary's Meals visit marysmealsusa.org or follow Mary's Meals on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).