



Our Impact Story

Mary's Meals 2024 Annual Impact Report

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For over two decades, Mary's Meals has been dedicated to addressing children's immediate need for food while enabling them to gain an education that can offer a pathway out of chronic poverty – not only for themselves but for future generations.

Mary's Meals is a simple yet transformative idea. We believe that the consistent provision of a daily meal at a place of education encourages children to attend school and focus on learning, while delivering our feeding programme in partnership with local volunteers empowers communities to work together for long-term change.

Throughout 2024 we worked with communities across 16 countries through our four Programme Affiliates and 20 Programme Partners, delivering school feeding to serve more than 2.4 million in over 5,000 places of education.

Our school meals: an overview of 2024 key programme metrics

To monitor the consistent delivery of our programme, we routinely collect data on core indicators, including feeding rate, attendance rate, and enrolment, across schools where our meals are served. We prioritise data collection and research to help us **learn** and **adapt** in pursuit of **programme excellence**.



The average monthly school attendance rate was **89%**.



The ratio of girls to boys receiving a daily meal was **50.3%** (girls) to **49.7%** (boys).

We successfully served meals on **91%** of school days.





We served over **362,943,000** meals globally in 2024.

Responding to an expanding hunger crisis

A convergence of conflicts, climate change impacts, and economic instability over the past three years has led to a significant increase in global hunger. A 2024 report found that 27% of children – one in four worldwide – are living in severe food poverty in early childhood, amounting to 181 million children under the age of five.¹ Mary's Meals is the forefront of the fight against child hunger and, in response to this global crisis, a key focus of our work during 2024 was rapid expansion.

We reached more children with school meals in our existing programmes and expanded into new regions across a variety of contexts. Our focus on targeting areas of great need meant that we needed to be agile and work closely with our implementing partners to ensure we could consistently serve children nutritious meals in their place of learning.

Our impact work demonstrates that the meals served in our school feeding programmes provide a crucial pathway for children to remain in school, thrive, and develop and, in future, help to build stronger, more resilient communities. Assessing the impact of our programme across diverse contexts requires tailored research to reflect the varied outcomes specific to particular regions or communities.

This report highlights the critical role that a daily meal at school plays in a child's experience of education, and how that impact is immediately felt by both pupils and teachers after the school feeding programme starts. We include a focus on feeding in post-conflict settings, where the school meals allow children to get back to regular routines. The impact findings in this report are a testament to the power of school feeding and confirm our commitment to reaching even more children with consistent daily meals in their place of education.



Serving more children in areas of great need: A year of major expansions

Through significant growth in targeted areas, we welcomed **an additional 330,000 children in over 700 schools** during 2024.

Ethiopia

In collaboration with our partner Daughters of Charity, we rapidly expanded our programme to reach **more than 60,000 additional children in over 150 schools across Tigray**. This significant expansion was delivered under incredibly challenging circumstances, following three years of disruption to education and a brutal two-year conflict.

Haiti

Despite ongoing political instability and widespread violence, we expanded our programme in partnership with Summits Education to reach **more than 9,000 additional children in over 30 schools** in the Central Plateau region.

Malawi

The Mary's Meals Malawi team worked hard to expand the programme, reaching **more than 100,000 additional children in over 100 schools**.

Mozambique

We began serving **more than 5,000 children in over 30 schools** across Mabalane District through our new partnership with Mozambique School Lunch Initiative (MSLI).

South Sudan

We worked with our partner Mary Help Association (MHA) to reach **more than 16,000 additional children in over 25 remote schools** in vulnerable areas across Western Barh el Ghazal.

Zambia

Working closely with government representatives and key stakeholders, the Mary's Meals Zambia team expanded the programme to reach **more than 140,000 additional children in over 400 schools** across Eastern Province.

Number of additional children per country



Expansion spotlight

The impact of our meals in new schools

As well as keeping our promise of a daily meal in school to those children already receiving Mary’s Meals, our work in 2024 focused heavily on significant expansion. To highlight the impact of the school feeding programme in **new** schools added during expansions, the following section provides a comparison of results from before and after the implementation of the of the programme.



² This figure is based on the % change from baseline to six months after feeding across our expansions in Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Sudan, and Zambia (where expansion schools had completed a full six months of feeding in 2024)

South Sudan

In 2024, South Sudan faced severe food insecurity and hunger, with an estimated 6.3 million people (47% of the population) experiencing 'Crisis' level (IPC Phase 3) or worse between September and November, including 1.71 million in 'Emergency' (IPC Phase 4) and 41,000 in 'Catastrophe' (IPC Phase 5).³ The most recent data indicates that the primary school completion rate was 35% for boys and 19% for girls.⁴ Mary's Meals has been serving school meals in South Sudan since 2008 (originally in Sudan) and is currently reaching **more than 45,000 children in over 90 schools** through our South Sudan partner Mary Help Association (MHA).

In South Sudan, in collaboration with our partner MHA, we conducted surveys with 36 children in our baseline study (before the programme began) and 40 children in our post-baseline study (after school feeding started).



Where we work



Before the programme began, **83% of children felt hungry every school day**. This dropped to **5%** after they began receiving Mary’s Meals.

“I am so attentive to my lesson, since I started eating a meal at school.”

Pupil, South Sudan

Prior to school feeding being introduced, only **31% of children said they never left school early because of hunger**. This increased to **60%** after children began receiving meals.

³ ipcinfo.org ⁴ iicba.unesco.org. Figures are from 2011



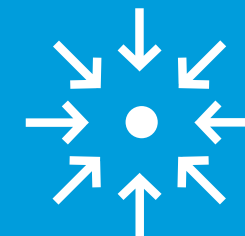
Zambia

In Zambia, we conducted surveys with 280 children and 19 teachers for our baseline study (before the programme began) and 280 children and 30 teachers in our post-baseline study (after school feeding started).



Where we work

Before school feeding began, **74%** of children said they worry about hunger at school ‘most of the time’ or ‘always.’ This dropped to **50%** once the children started receiving meals.



Before the school feeding programme, **37%** of teachers said children had good concentration levels in class. This increased to **100%** following the meal.

Prior to the introduction of meals, **76%** of children reported that they never leave school early because of hunger. Once the school feeding programme had begun, **90%** of children said they ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ leave school early because they are hungry.

“The school feeding programme has helped learners to stay in school from morning till evening when other activities are taking place. The porridge has promoted active participation in class and have healthy bodies less sickness of learners”

Teacher, Zambia



New partner serving Mary's Meals in Mozambique

In May, we announced a **new partnership and expansion to Mozambique** where we started **serving Mary's Meals to children living in the Mabalane District** through our local partner organisation, **Mozambique School Lunch Initiative (MSLI)**. Following a thorough global need analysis process, we selected and targeted Mozambique – and the Mabalane District area in particular – because of **its high need** relating to **hunger, education, and low school feeding coverage**. We also already have great experience and strong relationships in southern Africa, through our well-established work in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.



Mozambique

In 2024, Mozambique faced significant food insecurity challenges, with approximately 2.79 million people experiencing acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) between April and September. Projections indicated that this number would rise to 3.2 million between October 2024 and March 2025, primarily because of ongoing conflict in Cabo Delgado in the north of the country and climate-related shocks.⁵ The most recent data shows that the primary school completion rate was 61% for boys and 55% for girls. However, as of 2024, an estimated 3 million children remain out of school, highlighting persistent challenges in the education sector.⁶ In 2024, we started feeding **more than 5,000 children in over 30 schools** through our partnership with Mozambique School Lunch Initiative (MSLI).

In Mozambique, in collaboration with our partner MSLI, we conducted surveys with 84 children for our baseline study (before the programme began) and 71 children and 15 teachers in our post-baseline study (after school feeding started).



Before the programme began, **93%** of children felt hungry every school day. Once they started receiving Mary's Meals, **92%** of children said they never worry about hunger at school.



Before school feeding began, **58%** of children said they found it difficult to concentrate in the classroom because of hunger. After the programme started, **100%** of children felt they could concentrate well.



97% of teachers said that fewer children are dropping out of school this year because of the school feeding programme.

Before the school feeding programme, **83%** of children said they never leave school early because of hunger. Since school feeding began, **97%** of children said they 'rarely' or 'never' leave school early because they are hungry.

"Learners come to school on time, they no longer miss classes, and the most interesting [impact] is that I did not register even a single child who got sick through the school year. I have also noticed that children can stay more in school even after classes, playing."

Teacher, Mozambique



Our long-term impact

Child-focused indicators in our programming

For years, we have recognised that consistent school meals are a cornerstone of quality education, with far-reaching benefits for children and their communities. Our impact framework assesses how school meals influence a child’s readiness to learn, hunger reduction, and access to education. The data presented here includes perspectives from both children and teachers, collected through annual surveys across our four Programme Affiliates (Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Zambia).

Hunger reduction

Hunger is one of the most significant barriers to education, and hunger reduction is an immediate short-term outcome that improves a child’s readiness to learn.



School attendance

The daily school meal also encourages **school attendance** for the **full duration of the school day**, which is a key element of a child’s readiness to learn.



75% of children said they never leave early during the school day because of hunger.⁸

Only 5% of children said they miss school because of hunger.⁹

“I am very happy as Mary’s Meals’ school feeding programme has helped our school progression. As a high school graduate, I am inspired to be a classroom teacher to help empower children of my community get an education”

Teacher, Liberia

71% of teachers said fewer children are dropping out of school because of the school feeding programme.¹⁰

Participation

School meals improve children’s **concentration and energy levels** and support their readiness to actively participate in the classroom, creating a conducive environment for **learning and progression**.

35% of children felt they could concentrate well before the meal was served. This increased to 98% after they had eaten.¹¹



Only 2% of teachers told us that children in their classroom had high energy levels before the meal. This increased to 98% after the meal was served.¹³

Following the meal, 95% of teachers said that children had high levels of concentration in class.¹²



The consistent provision of a daily meal is more than a motivation to attend school; it means that when children do attend, they also receive the nourishment they need to focus and actively participate in their learning. This provides an important feedback mechanism for children to continue attending, confident in their ability to understand lessons and progress through school, opening possibilities for the future.

Leah, a pupil in Zambia, understands the importance of daily meals in helping her to attend school and also do her best while she is there. She says: “I used to stay away from school but now I do not miss classes ... Before Mary’s Meals I was not able to perform in class. Now I am able to concentrate and do better.”



100% 

of teachers stated that the school feeding programme has had a positive impact on the quality of education this year, including improvements in attendance, participation, focus and lesson retention, pass rate, and a reduction in sickness and absenteeism.¹⁴

Sense of normality

In Ethiopia, an accumulation of major challenges including the Covid-19 pandemic, extended periods of drought, and a brutal two-year conflict led to an estimated 2.3 million children being out of school in the region of Tigray. Many of these children had not had the opportunity to attend school since pandemic-related closures in 2020.

In 2024, in collaboration with our partner Daughters of Charity, Mary’s Meals undertook a momentous initiative to reignite hope within communities and encourage children into school by rapidly expanding its school feeding programme to reach tens of thousands of learners with vital sustenance in a place of education. Data was collected from 60 children and their teachers in schools before and after the implementation of the school feeding programme in expansion schools in Tigray.

Our desire was to deepen our understanding of the unique impacts of school feeding programmes in post-conflict settings – in addition to expansion outcomes – by exploring key concepts in relation to a return to a **sense of normality**.



Key learnings

Consistency in daily routine

Consistent provision of a daily meal served at school can increase a child’s sense of an established daily routine. We know that a familiar routine reassures children and supports a child’s feeling of control and lessens stress and anxiety.

Prior to the programme, **77%** of children felt they had a daily routine. After school meals were introduced, this increased to **98%**.

Strong social network

Schools provide important social support opportunities for children post-conflict through social interaction including playing with friends. The daily meal encourages children to stay in school for the duration of the day providing a strong social network for children, helping them to cope with negative emotions.

Before school feeding, **47%** of teachers said that children played together after school at least a few times a week. This increased to **87%** once the programme began.



Active participation in class

The daily school meals encourage active participation in school – an indicator of student confidence, feelings of safety, and ownership of learning

Prior to meals being introduced, **88%** of children answered teacher questions at least a few times a week. Once school feeding began, this increased to **100%**.

Prior to school feeding, **88%** of teachers stated there had been good (moderate to high) engagement in class. This increased to **100%** following the introduction of the daily meal.



Peaceful classrooms

By providing a haven for children and offering daily stability, school environments minimise conflict and foster conflict resolution. The daily meal is integral to supporting peaceful environments and lessening conflict at home and in the broader community, in turn promoting more peaceful communities.



Before the school feeding programme, **20%** of teachers described the classroom as a peaceful environment. This increased to **100%** once feeding began in schools, thanks in part to the daily meal.

“Since the school feeding programme began, I have not only observed improvements in students’ academic performance but also saw smiles on the faces of both girls and boys; expressions that had been absent since the devastating conflict in Tigray.”

Teacher, Tigray





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