

Mary's Meals makes urgent call for support amid worsening Malawi food crisis

CRISIS IN MALAWI

With 2.8 million people in Malawi facing chronic hunger, global school feeding charity Mary's Meals today launches the urgent campaign, Crisis in Malawi, in an effort to help lessen the devastating impact of the country's current food crisis.

Southern Africa is facing its gravest state of food insecurity in many years – a combination of severe droughts and flooding has destroyed crops and devastated harvests.

In Malawi, one of the most severely affected countries, many families are on the brink of starvation and the Malawian government has declared a state of national emergency. The southern districts, where Mary's Meals has a major presence, are worst hit.

Mary's Meals currently provides more than 800,000 Malawian children with a nutritious daily meal in school, supported by a countrywide network of 65,000 dedicated community volunteers – often mothers who cook and serve the food for their children.

Through its Crisis in Malawi campaign, the charity is appealing for support to ensure that the hundreds of thousands of children who already depend on its school feeding programme can continue to be fed, while – as funds allow – expanding to reach even more children, in the most chronically food-insecure areas.

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, the organisation's founder and chief executive, has just returned from Malawi, the country where Mary's Meals first began its work amidst the devastating famine of 2002.

Magnus said: "I am appalled at the suffering of the people at the centre of this deepening crisis. I spoke to family after family who have already run out of food so soon after their harvest, who really do not know how they will survive the coming months. There is real desperation in many rural areas, but I also heard repeatedly that Mary's Meals was their one certainty.

"The promise of a daily school meal has never been more important in Malawi and we are determined to maintain that promise to the hundreds of thousands of children already benefitting and to find a way to reach even more schools in the worst-affected areas. On behalf of all those families I met, I want to thank with all my heart those who are supporting our mission at this time of very great need."

During this time of crisis, the daily meal Mary's Meals provides is not just a powerful incentive to come to school – but a vital lifeline for vulnerable children in desperate need of nourishment.

This is something mother-of-six Eurita, 43, knows very well. Since her husband died, she has fought to keep the family going, but recently – with the fields yielding little and work very scarce – it has been impossible to make ends meet. Amidst this crisis, she fears for the future of her young children.

"I just watch my children and I feel helpless," Eurita says. "There is no food at home and it's heart-breaking as a mother to see my children like this. I am in the dark. I do not know where my family is heading and I'm scared."

But there is some light in Eurita's daily struggle for survival. Her children now attend Mchenga Primary School every day, where they receive a nutritious mugful of vitamin-enriched maize porridge from Mary's Meals.

The charity needs public support to continue providing a safety net for struggling families like Eurita's, for whom school feeding guarantees a daily meal for their children – vital support at this time when access to food is so limited and parents fear for their children's futures.

For more information about Mary's Meals and to donate, please visit www.marysmeals.org

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Notes to Editors

- Interviews, additional case studies and images are available on request.
- In April, the President of Malawi declared a state of national disaster, announcing that severe drought conditions had caused the country to be short of one million tonnes of maize needed to feed its people in the months ahead.
- The government of Malawi estimates that more than eight million people – or half the country’s population – could need food aid by the end of 2016, as this prolonged crisis continues to worsen.
- Mary’s Meals is a simple idea that works. The charity provides one daily meal in a place of learning in order to attract chronically poor children into the classroom, where they receive an education that can, in the future, be their ladder out of poverty.
- Mary’s Meals feeds 1,101,206 hungry children every school day across four continents, in countries including Malawi, Liberia, Kenya, Zambia, Haiti, Uganda, South Sudan, Thailand and India.
- The average global cost to feed a child with Mary’s Meals for a whole school year is just £12.20 / \$19.50 / €14.50.
- Research from Malawi shows that, after the introduction of Mary’s Meals, parents who say they worry about their child going hungry dropped by 94%, and teachers saying ‘children in my class never complain of hunger’ increased from 7% to 87%.
- In schools where Mary’s Meals are served, hunger is reduced, enrolment increases, attendance improves, drop-out rates fall, absences dwindle, concentration in lessons is heightened, attainment levels increase, parents are less anxious, and children are happier.
- The Mary’s Meals campaign was born in 2002 when Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow visited Malawi during a famine and met a mother dying from AIDS. When Magnus asked her eldest son Edward what his dreams were in life, he replied simply: “I want to have enough food to eat and to go to school one day.”
- Mary’s Meals is committed to spending at least 93% of donations directly on its charitable activities. This is only possible because most of the charity’s work is done by an army of dedicated volunteers – including more than 65,000 in Malawi alone.
- Please visit www.marysmeals.org to find out more about the work of Mary’s Meals.

Media contacts

Liz Leydon, Editorial Manager
liz.leydon@marysmeals.org | 0141 336 7094

Nicolle Laurie, Communications Officer
nicolle.laurie@marysmeals.org | 0141 336 7094