

## Mary's Meals and the Millennium Development Goals



The right to have enough food to eat to sustain life is one of the most basic rights of all. Education is also a human right which should be claimed and used by every child. Basic needs such as these are recognized in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), drawn up by the UN. These goals are a blueprint to relieve the suffering of the world's poorest people. The target date to achieve these goals is 2015.

Mary's Meals is a movement to set up school feeding programmes in communities where poverty stops children from gaining an education. The work of Mary's Meals is contributing to the achievement of the first four MDGs:

- Goal 1**      **End Poverty and Hunger**
- Goal 2**      **Universal Education**
- Goal 3**      **Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women**
- Goal 4**      **Reduce Child Mortality**

### Mary's Meals Helps Overcome Poverty and Hunger

Hunger and lack of education are linked in many complex ways. The hungry child is focussed on finding his next meal not going to school. To find that next meal may mean; begging, working or looking after brothers and sisters to allow parents to earn a living. Even if the hungry child does make it to the classroom an empty stomach is not conducive to concentrating or learning. Chronically hungry children are also more likely to fall sick and miss school or simply be too weak to walk to school on occasion. Yet gaining an education is recognised as the most effective route out of poverty for an individual – and a whole nation. Providing children from poor communities with a meal in school is a sure way to attract them into the classroom every day.

*"I do not worry about being hungry anymore because the porridge is filling"*

Cosmas Mvakaleya  
Grade 7 Pupil, Malawi

### Mary's Meals - Education For All

Yet gaining an education is recognised as the most effective route out of poverty for an individual – and a whole nation. Providing children from poor communities with a meal in school is a sure way to attract them into the classroom every day. Mary's Meals helps address the obstacle of hunger. It enables children to attend school, and therefore, contributes to achieving universal primary education.

*"Since the programme started in the school, there are completely no dropouts. Those who miss their classes do so because of sickness or any other genuine reasons. The community is fully supporting the programme."*

Mr Mwaniki,  
Head Teacher, Malawi

### **Mary's Meals Empowers Women**

Girls are most likely to miss out on an education. Poor families often choose to send boys to school and keep girls at home to help in the home or in the fields. By offering a daily meal in school Mary's Meals removes burdens from the shoulders of struggling families. They are happy to send their children to school, including their daughters, knowing that at least their children are assured one meal in the day.

Mary's Meals is dependant on the generosity of local volunteers taking their turn to cook and serve the food. In Malawi around 12 000 volunteers are involved in the work of Mary's Meals. Most of these volunteers are women. Many will not have had the benefit of an education themselves. Through their involvement with Mary's Meals they are drawn into contact with the school and become enthused about the opportunity an education offers to their children. They then want their daughters to have that opportunity too.

*"Over 15 mums were waiting to take their turn in cooking this morning – some had walked the regular 7Km from the village of Kameza, getting up at 5am to be here by 6am. The only reason they come to the school is to cook for the children."*

Andrea Kirkbride, Country Director, Mary's Meals Malawi

### **Mary's Meals Reduces Child Mortality**

The Mary's Meals programmes in Under 6 Centres meet the needs of the most vulnerable children including orphans. This age group of children is most at risk from the effects of poor nutrition such as stunting and cognitive impairment. In a country like Malawi with over 1 million orphans, children who have lost their parents and are living with guardians are at particular risk. The family that has taken them in is likely to be struggling to feed their own children. In the Mary's Meals Under 6 centres the children attending receive 2 meals each day in recognition of their need for good nutrition. They are also given regular health and developmental checks and referred for specialist help when required. In addition, as our volunteers are trained in basic food hygiene, these skills can be brought back to the home to aid in the prevention of food borne and hygiene related disease.

*Nelia works with the Mary's Meals Malawi team. The part of her job she likes best is measuring the children attending the Under 6 Centres. She likes it because she can see the difference Mary's Meals makes with her own eyes - often within 6 weeks of a child receiving Mary's Meals.*

