

Questions and answers

Here are some questions you may be asked when giving a presentation about Mary's Meals, and our suggested answers.

This document is intended to help you prepare for your presentation, please do not hand it out to others.

If you have a question that isn't covered here, you can get in touch with your [usual contact at Mary's Meals](#).

You can also find more information about the countries we serve on the [Where we work](#) pages of our website.

Do you have evidence of the positive impact of Mary's Meals?

- In Malawi, the percentage of children who said they felt hungry 'most of the time' or 'always' reduced from 42% to 1% after one year of receiving Mary's Meals.
- In Zambia, 98% of children told us that they have energy after eating Mary's Meals' porridge, three years after the introduction of our programme.
- In Malawi, enrolment increased by 39% across schools we surveyed in the first three years of the Mary's Meals programme.

How do you know your meals encourage children to attend school?

Research conducted in Malawi, Zambia and Liberia has revealed that there was a 20% increase in school enrolment following the introduction of Mary's Meals.

This research also found that the proportion of hungry children fell by 71%, and 98% of teachers felt children concentrated better in class.

Do girls get to attend school and benefit from Mary's Meals?

In many of the places where we work, girls are less likely to go to school because of social expectations, which result in boys' education being prioritised. Girls are also disproportionately affected by safety risks in travelling to school, and early pregnancy / marriage.

However, we know that our meals encourage families to send their daughters to school and enable girls to concentrate and learn once they are there; 50% of all the children who eat Mary's Meals are girls.

What is the nutritional value of the food?

We work with schools and communities to decide what food to serve in each country and, where possible, this is fortified with vitamins and minerals. For example:

- In Malawi and Zambia, we serve corn-soya blend porridge fortified with a range of vitamins.
- In Haiti, a typical meal consists of rice or maize with beans and a sauce made from vegetables or fish.
- In India, we serve vegetable curries with rice.

These varied menu choices across our programme countries highlight our commitment to serving children nutritious school meals whilst taking into consideration locally appropriate ingredients.

Does Mary's Meals import food, or does it use local food?

Wherever possible, Mary's Meals serves locally produced food. This supports the local community and its farmers as well as the wider economy. Food is only imported if it is not available locally.

How are children fed during the weekend and holidays?

Mary's Meals focuses our activities on providing meals during the school term so that we can meet a hungry child's immediate need for a nutritious meal and attract them to the classroom, where they can receive an all-important education.

In instances of particularly severe hunger we will at times, as funds allow, feed children most at risk during the holidays – but this is not our core focus. The hope is that families have enough food at home to nourish everyone.

Does Mary's Meals intend to be involved in school feeding permanently?

Research has indicated that, in order to be effective, school feeding programmes require long-term commitment.

Mary's Meals works in the world's poorest countries where governments are faced with many challenges such as a strain on health services, food shortages, illiteracy and people living in extreme poverty.

Although it is our long-term hope that governments will eventually take on responsibility for school feeding programmes, it is clear that in many cases this will not be possible for some time. Mary's Meals will always seek to continue feeding children until we are no longer needed.

We believe that children who receive Mary's Meals will grow up – better nourished and better educated – to become the men and women who will lift their communities out of poverty and end their reliance on aid. You can see some of the children who have benefited from Mary's Meals in our film, [Generation Hope](#).

Many of the children pictured are wearing school uniforms. Do families have to pay for them?

This varies between countries. Uniforms are commonly homemade and have often been handed down through families. Children, and their parents, often feel a sense of real pride in having a school uniform.

Does Mary's Meals work with other local charities in countries?

There are a number of instances where Mary's Meals works with other charities to deliver both meals in schools and other support, such as hand washing facilities.

In addition, our school feeding programmes are delivered in partnership with local communities, who organise a rota of volunteers to cook and serve the meals for the children.

Does Mary's Meals respond to emergencies?

Mary's Meals has a long history of providing emergency relief in vulnerable regions around the world.

Our charity grew out of a response to the Bosnian conflict in the early 1990s, and Mary's Meals first provided emergency relief in Haiti in 2010, following the earthquake that ripped through Port-au-Prince and wrecked the schools where we fed thousands of children living in terrible poverty.

In recent years we have also responded to flooding in Kerala in India in 2018, the worsening crisis in war-torn South Sudan in 2018, the Ebola crisis in Liberia, and the severe rainfall and flooding in Malawi in 2019, to name but a few.

At the heart of any emergency relief work we undertake is always our principle of feeding vulnerable children in a place of education. In many cases, we have been able to extend our support to reach wider communities.

Mary's Meals has strong relationships with partners operating throughout the world. Should an emergency situation arise in an area where we have a trusted local partner, we will work together in order to reach those suffering most.

Are the activities of Mary's Meals carried out in an environmentally responsible manner?

We aim to deliver cost-effective programmes that promote community ownership and engagement, provide a good return on investment and are institutionally, economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. Some examples of this are:

- In Liberia, we have school gardens where pupils, teachers and community volunteers can learn about environmental issues and gain new skills, while growing tasty and nutritious vegetables to supplement our meals.
- In Malawi and Zambia, where deforestation is a major problem, we help communities to establish woodlots (small woodlands that provide a sustainable source of firewood).
- We have also introduced fuel-efficient brick stoves, which are more cost effective and environmentally friendly to run.

Does Mary's Meals provide teaching staff in any of the countries?

Mary's Meals does not fund or provide any teaching staff for the schools enrolled in its feeding programme. Our focus is to enable hungry children to attend school by providing daily meals.

There are children going hungry in the UK. Why should we donate to children overseas? And why doesn't Mary's Meals work in the UK?

Our mission has always been to help those suffering extreme poverty in the world's poorest communities, where hunger often prevents children from going to school and gaining an education.

We make it possible for those children to receive a daily meal and remain in school which, in turn, offers them the chance to reach their potential and fulfil their dreams.

There are many great charities who support children and families in the UK. We share similar aims and aspirations through our work to enable children to thrive and to look forward to a brighter future.

Are you a Catholic charity?

Mary's Meals is named after Mary, the mother of Jesus, who brought up her own child in poverty while ensuring that he was nurtured and could develop into a healthy individual.

Mary's Meals grew out of the Christian Catholic faith of our founder and the values and ethos we hold reflect this. We consist of, respect and reach out to people of all faiths and none.

Meals are provided for children from all faith backgrounds and none, and our mandate as a charity directs us simply to focus on those in greatest need.

How much of the money that people donate is used to feed children?

As an organisation working in some of the world's poorest communities, Mary's Meals keeps its running costs low to maximise the good it can do with the donations entrusted to it – and it is committed to spending at least 93% of all funds received on its charitable activities.

This is only possible because the charity is supported by an incredible network of volunteers who give their time and skills to help feed hungry children. In the countries where Mary's Meals works, these volunteers rise early to prepare the nutritious meals for hungry children in their communities. And in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, volunteers play a vital role in growing support for our charity's important work.

How does Mary's Meals work in partnership with local communities?

Mary's Meals sets up school feeding programmes which are ultimately owned and run by community volunteers in the countries where we provide food.

School feeding committees – made up of parents, teachers and volunteers – are crucial to our work and one of the first things to be established in any new area receiving Mary's Meals.