

Slide 1



Good evening, my name is Molly and I am a community volunteer with the charity Mary's Meals.

I'd like to start by thanking those of you who already support the work of Mary's Meals. Your kindness and generosity are changing the lives of children around the world.

For those of you who have never heard of Mary's Meals before, I'm so grateful for this opportunity to tell you about our work. Today I am also going to talk about some of the challenges girls in particular face when accessing education and how Mary's Meals is helping them to overcome these barriers, and I'll share some incredible stories of some of the girls who receive Mary's Meals.

Slide 2



Hunger remains the number one health risk in the world today. Tragically, hunger kills more people each year than AIDS, malaria and TB combined.

200 million children's lives are at risk because they are malnourished, and more than 71 million primary school-age children are out of school around the world.

Instead of sitting in classrooms, children are working in fields, begging on street corners or scavenging among rubbish to find enough food just to survive. Today, too many children will wake up and go to bed hungry, and I don't think that's right. That's why I'm here this evening.

Slide 3



Our vision is that every child receives one daily meal in their place of education and that all those who have more than they need, share with those who lack even the most basic things.

Our vision at Mary's Meals is that every child receives one daily meal in their place of education, and that all those who have more than they need, share with those that lack even the most basic of things.

Working together with those who share our vision, we believe there is no good reason why this cannot be realised.

At the heart of Mary's Meals lies a simple idea which can transform the lives of millions of people around the world.

Providing a child with one daily meal in a place of education not only feeds the child's body, it helps feed their mind too and provides families with a greater incentive to enrol their children in school.

We believe that education is essential to breaking the cycle of poverty. Children receiving Mary's Meals today can grow up well-nourished and well-educated, to become the men and women who will lift their communities out of poverty and end their reliance on aid.

Slide 4



The work of Scottish International Relief took a new turn in 2002. Magnus was visiting Malawi and the country was in the grip of famine. It was here he met Emma, a mother who was dying and who was surrounded by her six children.

Emma was lying on a straw mat. She was wrapped in an old blanket and was wringing her hands continuously as she spoke. She whispered to Magnus: "There is nothing left now except to pray that someone looks after my children when I'm gone." Emma's husband had died a year previously, killed by AIDS, the same disease that was now about to steal her from her children.

Magnus tried to lift the atmosphere by asking 14-year-old Edward, Emma's eldest child, what his hopes and ambitions were. Magnus did not expect that the response would change his life and the lives of more than two million others.

Slide 5



Edward replied: "I would like to have enough to eat and I would like to be able to go to school one day."

This was a call that could not be ignored. It led to the evolution of Scottish International Relief into Mary's Meals as it is today.

The shed where Magnus and his family stored donations all those years ago still serves as the global headquarters for Mary's Meals today!

Slide 6



Mary's Meals is now feeding hungry children living in 16 countries across the globe. We are reaching the world's poorest children who have no other safety net.

So what do we serve the children?

In Malawi, Liberia and Zambia, we serve a vitamin-enriched porridge. In India we serve vegetable curry or lentil dhal with rice.

Wherever possible, we serve locally produced food. This supports the local community and its farmers, as well as the wider economy.

Slide 7



Not only do we feed children in 16 countries every school day, we feed more than 2.6 million children in those countries.

Slide 8



It costs just £19.15 to provide a child with Mary's Meals every school day for a whole year.

We keep our running costs low to maximise the good we can do with the donations entrusted to us.

This is only possible because most of our work is done by a global network of dedicated volunteers who carry out lots of little acts of love on behalf of Mary's Meals.

Slide 9



At Mary's Meals, community is at the heart of everything we do.

Our school feeding programme is owned and run by the communities who benefit from it.

Many of the communities in which we work are facing hardship and adversity. But by working together and with our support, these communities are responding with innovation, creativity and determination to build a better future for their children.

Selfless volunteers like Eliane from Madagascar make our work possible, feeding children and growing their community for the better.

Slide 10



Mary's Meals is not only a powerful incentive to come to school, the daily meal also gives children the energy to learn and play.

When Mary's Meals starts at a school our research shows that hunger is reduced, there is improved school enrolment and attendance levels, improved attainment, increased community support for education, and children are happier!

Slide 11



Our research shows that Mary's Meals reduces children's hunger at school. 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.

Three years after the introduction of our programme in Zambia, 98% of children told us that they have energy after eating Mary's Meals porridge. At Mary's Meals, we believe in the power of porridge!

Our research also shows that enrolment increases in schools where Mary's Meals provides school meals, and surrounding communities report fewer children being out of school. In Malawi, enrolment increased by 39% in schools we surveyed in the first three years of the Mary's Meals programme.

Slide 12



Our school feeding programmes encourage **all** children to attend school. Sadly, extreme poverty can leave parents with impossible choices and as a result, girls can face significant challenges in accessing education.

In many of the countries where we work, girls are often expected to look after the household or other family members, they may have to work to ease financial burdens on the family, extreme poverty may force them into early marriage or teenage pregnancy.

UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 is a commitment to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." This goal is a pivotal driver for positive change, emphasizing the transformative power of education in fostering a sustainable and equitable world, and is at the heart of our work at Mary's Meals.

Slide 13



Girls make up 50% of the children in school across our global programme.

By providing a daily school meal, we are helping girls to overcome barriers to education, attracting them into the classroom with the promise of that daily meal.

Slide 14



The girls who receive Mary's Meals today can one day grow up, well-nourished and well-educated, to become the women who will lift their communities out of poverty.

I'd like to tell you more about three of them today.

Slide 15



The first is Beyonce, who lives in Zimbabwe with her father, Brasio, and attends Danckwerts Primary School.

Slide 16



If you had visited Danckwerts Primary School in Zimbabwe before Mary's Meals was introduced, you'd have noticed Beyonce sitting separately from the other students at break.

Her dad, Brasio, was so ashamed of how little he could afford to give her for lunchtime, he would tell her to go to a secluded place at school to eat so nobody else could see. Lunchtimes for Beyonce are different now, as she sits laughing with her friends. Now, she receives the same meal as her classmates – a mug of fortified corn-soya porridge from Mary's Meals – and Brasio says this is a huge relief.

Beyonce's story has a difficult beginning. Her mother abandoned her when Beyonce was just a baby. Neighbours alerted her father to her crying in a locked room, and he immediately returned from the capital Harare, where he had been working.

Slide 17



Today, Brasio and Beyonce live in a small home together. It's a simple structure, with a bed on one side and improvised shelving making up the kitchen on the other.

Brasio told us: "It was difficult when there was nothing to eat at school and Beyonce would come home and there was nothing here either. But earlier this year, Beyonce told me she would now be getting Mary's Meals.

"From that moment, I was not worried about her going to school without anything because I knew that she was going to get a meal there. It has become a relief to me. The only hope I have is the feeding programme; it is something that is helping me to take care of her. I cannot send her to anyone else. It's the only way she can get a proper meal."

Slide 18



Beyonce has dreams of becoming a pilot, and thanks to her daily meal in school, she's one step closer to a high-flying future.

"The porridge is so good and tasty and also for children like us who don't carry anything to school, it helps us. After eating the porridge we can start concentrating, we can also write like any other children in class.

"I try my best at school. Education is important to me, I see it as an escape route for the way that my mother left me. I hope that one day I will be successful, I will help my father who has helped me since I was a toddler. I hope that one day I will also help other children and other people to have a better life."

Beyonce is so full of potential. She has ambition, confidence, and a supportive father who wants her to be happy. The difference that a daily school meal can make to her chances of fulfilling that potential cannot be understated.

Slide 19



Here is a video of Beyonce's story, your support means she can attend school and grow into a successful young woman.

Slide 20



Lydia is 16 and attends primary school in Ethiopia.

Our Mary's Meals team first met Lydia five years ago, when she was 11. She was a confident young girl, who dreamt of being a pilot, her confidence beaming through as she described her love of reading and her joy at receiving Mary's Meals.

Slide 21



Her confidence comes from her mother, Shewit. A teacher at the school, Shewit is clearly a role model for all of the young female pupils and a fierce advocate for them too. Speaking back then, she said:

"My parents didn't want me to go to school but my daughter doesn't need to face such things.

"Before, there was a push by the family to get married because they didn't think girls can achieve anything or even be educated. Now there is no such thinking about girls... females can achieve their goals if they are educated."

Lydia believed in the power of education too saying: "Education makes us perfect. If we do not educate, we cannot save our country and we cannot be in a safe place. I hope all of us will decide the future of our country."



Her youthful optimism couldn't have predicted the devastating years that followed. Nobody could. Years of dreadful conflict closed schools and killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, and an awful drought ravaged the fields already torn apart by war.

Despite this trauma, Shewit never let Lydia give up.

Lydia told us: "My mother constantly encourages me and reminds me of my worth, preventing me from falling into despair."

That renewed hope came from Mary's Meals as the schools reopened too, as Lydia explained:

"Education empowers us to contribute positively to our country. Without the feeding programme, we would struggle to focus on our studies due to hunger. However, with the meals, we are more alert and motivated. When you eat and learn, you become attentive and understand what the teacher is teaching you."

Slide 23



Education has the power to transform girls' lives and lift communities out of poverty. As a teacher, Shewit told us:

"Educating a girl means you educate the whole family. Girls are close to the whole family because they become the mother, and then they have a big chance to change the whole family."

And as a mother, she explained:

"Through constant motivation and encouragement, I am confident that Lydia will persevere and achieve her goals, and I eagerly anticipate celebrating her accomplishments with pride."

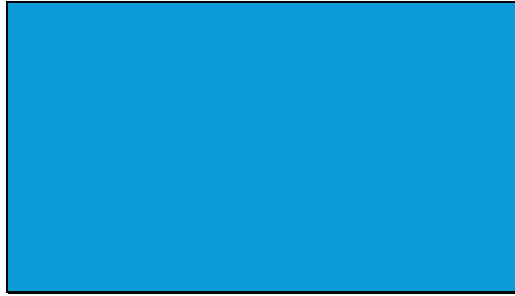
Slide 24



Despite the hardship she has faced, Lydia is determined to make the most of her education and fulfil her potential.

Thanks to your support, girls like Lydia across our programmes are receiving life-changing school meals and accessing the education that can transform their lives, and help them become the women who will lift their communities out of poverty.

Slide 25



In this video, you can see how Lydia has grown over the past five years, and hear from her and her mother Shewit, about the positive impact Mary's Meals is having on Lydia and her whole community.

Slide 26



Mallak, 11, began noticing that fewer and fewer of her classmates were attending school in Yemen.

"As there is no food at school, more and more had to stay at home," she said.

Without food, she struggled to focus during class, but the arrival of Mary's Meals changed everything – classrooms were once again full of determined, hopeful young people looking to lay the foundations of a bright future.

Mallak told us: "Before, we didn't get any meal or food, and the number of students who attended the classes were few. After the meal distribution, more and more started attending."

Your continued support allows children like Mallak not to feel hungry during the school day and to feel excited about learning again: "What I like the most about school is gathering with my friends to learn. I used to not find some of my friends at the school anymore, but because we're getting the school meals, I can meet them again!"

Slide 27



After ten years of civil war, climate related crises and a deteriorating economy, Yemen is in the midst of a humanitarian crisis.

Despite this, Summer Nasser, CEO of Mary's Meals partner Yemen Aid explains how Mary's Meals is helping to transform the future of young girls in Yemen and that building a better Yemen can only happen if its female population are able and supported to educate themselves.

She said: "Girls in rural or impoverished areas face many obstacles and challenges. When money is tight or food is scarce, girls are the first to stay home. They're expected to help with chores, care for siblings, or even marry young to ease the financial burden on their families. In remote areas, girls are often tasked with fetching water from distant locations during the day, leaving them no opportunity to attend school."

Slide 28



Summer continues: “Education is vital for all, but advocating for girls is especially important. Educated women foster social stability, champion equitable policies, and take on leadership roles that drive change. Educated mothers prioritize their children’s education, breaking cultural stigmas and creating generational progress. In the long term, empowering girls strengthens Yemen’s economy and builds a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous future for all.”

Slide 29



The long-term impact of supporting girls in education is already being seen in the communities where we work.

Teacher Bernadette works at Chilomoni Primary School, in Malawi, the same school that she attended herself when she was a young girl.

“And I’m even teaching with the teachers that taught me at that time!”, she told us.

But her journey to get here was not straightforward. When Bernadette first started attending school, she suffered from debilitating hunger. It deprived her of energy and reduced her confidence in class.

She said: “I was one of the children from a disadvantaged background, often going to school on an empty stomach”

Bernadette was a bright student, but she struggled to have this reflected in her grades.



In 2008, however, Mary's Meals arrived at Bernadette's school, and her life started to change for the better. In the four years where she ate Mary's Meals at school, her performance soared. Bernadette improved her grades so much, she was chosen out of a select few to go to secondary school. This was in no large part due to her own determination to succeed and lift herself out of poverty, but when asked, she humbly credits Mary's Meals.

She told us: "Every time I was in the top three positions in my class, it was because of Mary's Meals. This programme provided us with the sustenance we needed to thrive in school. I owe a great deal of my success to them. Without them, I would have been at home, battling hunger. But now, I am a teacher, right here at the same school where I was once a beneficiary of the school feeding programme.

I believe I am one of the girls who has truly emerged from poverty. With the arrival of Mary's Meals, things changed for the better. We no longer had to worry about hunger, and our minds were free to concentrate on our studies."

Bernadette's story is one that truly shows the legacy of Mary's Meals. By providing a nutritious meal every school day and keeping our promise to the children who rely on us, we are empowering the next generation of women to build a better future for themselves and their communities.

Slide 31



Today, 119 million girls are out of school worldwide. Together, we can change their future.

Without our incredible supporters, none of our work is possible.

By supporting Mary's Meals and spreading the word about our mission, you can give girls opportunities that they otherwise may not have and help them to break the cycle of poverty.

*NB this figure refers to girls of all ages, not just primary school aged girls.

Slide 32



Agnes Maulana, a headteacher in Malawi summed it up perfectly when she said: "When you educate a girl, you educate a nation."

Slide 33



We are so grateful to all those who choose to support our mission. There are many ways that you can choose to support our work, whether sharing our story with friends and family, signing up to our promise pledger regular giving, making a donation, or by choosing to be a volunteer – like me.

Through our online shop, marysmeals.org.uk/shop, you can support a child to receive Mary's Meals for an entire school year with the purchase of

a Her Education gift card. This will help Mary's Meals ensure that more teachers like Shewit have a classroom full of energetic attentive pupils and more girls like Lydia and Beyonce have a chance to fulfil their dreams.

Slide 34



Thank you so much for inviting me to join you today.

Slide 35



To find out more please visit our website, marysmeals.org.uk