

mary's meals

Press release

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Liberia**

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Global child hunger charity Mary's Meals has resumed its school feeding programme in Liberia after schools across the country started to reopen for the first time since the Ebola crisis struck.

In normal circumstances, Mary's Meals reaches more than 128,000 impoverished children across Liberia each day, attracting them to the classroom with a nutritious meal in school.

However, the recent crisis brought a six-month halt to the charity's usual feeding programme in the country after the Liberian government was forced to shut all of its schools in an attempt to stop the disease spreading.

In the intervening period, Mary's Meals mounted an Ebola crisis response, delivering food aid to thousands of affected people, including patients infected with the virus.

A decline in new Ebola cases in recent weeks, however, means that the Liberian government is allowing schools to gradually re-open, providing they adhere to strict disease prevention measures.

As a result, Mary's Meals and its army of local volunteers have sprung into action and are steadily re-introducing school feeding, which acts as a powerful incentive for children to attend classes in this deeply impoverished nation.

Mary's Meals' staff on the ground are working closely with schools to ensure reasonable safety measures are in place, and to share advice on preventing infection. Before entering the classroom, every child and staff member must have their temperatures checked and disinfect their hands with a chlorine solution.

Mariama, 13, was one of the first children able to resume her studies recently after her school, at which she receives Mary's Meals, opened for the first time since last year.

She said: "I'm very happy to be back in school because I haven't learnt anything over the last few months. I want to be an accountant and these next few years in school will be an important time for me."

The reopening of schools in Liberia has provided reason for optimism, but education workers believe there is much to be done before the country can return to any kind of normality.

Evelyn Twum, a District Education Officer from Bomi County, said: "There's still a lot of fear in communities.

"Parents are worried if they send their children to school there will be another Ebola outbreak. But Mary's Meals is going a long way towards addressing that problem. If parents know their children will get food in school they will send them."

Even before the Ebola crisis began, Liberia had one of the highest rates of out-of-school children in the world, with more than 40% of the country's school-aged population not attending classes. This is a serious problem which the Mary's Meals programme is directly addressing, with increased enrolment rates reported wherever the charity begins feeding.

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, Mary's Meals' founder and CEO, stressed how important it was that the charity had been able to continue providing vital food supplies during the crisis.

He said: "It was crucial for Mary's Meals to be able to continue feeding children throughout the Ebola outbreak, working side by side with local communities to reach those most in need.

"But after the trauma of the last months, it's important that we now get children back into school and we are delighted to be able to resume our usual school feeding programme.

“We hope and pray that classrooms across Liberia will soon be full again of children taking the next steps in their education, while enjoying the reassurance of a daily meal.

“It is thanks to the generosity of our supporters that Mary’s Meals was able to act quickly during the Ebola crisis and I want to thank them again now for supporting, as I know they will do, the re-introduction of school feeding for 128,000 children in Liberia.”

Mary’s Meals sets up and runs school feeding programmes in communities where hunger and poverty prevent children from gaining an education. The charity currently provides a meal every school day for more than 989,000 children in 12 countries.

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Notes to editors:

- Images, case studies and interviews are available on request.
- There had been no new Ebola cases reported in Liberia for 20 days, until a woman tested positive in the capital Monrovia last Friday – undermining growing hopes that the country might soon be declared Ebola-free.
- Mary’s Meals began in Malawi in 2002 when its founder Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow met a young woman called Emma who was dying from AIDS. She was sitting on the mud floor of her hut surrounded by her children. When Magnus asked her 14-year-old son what his dreams were in life, his stark reply was: “I want to have enough food to eat and to go to school one day”. This was a key part of the inspiration that led to the founding of Mary’s Meals.
- Mary’s Meals began feeding 200 children in one Malawian primary school in 2002. Today, the organisation reaches 989,791 children with a daily meal in school in 12 countries, across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Find out more about Mary’s Meals at: www.marysmeals.org
- Follow Mary’s Meals on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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