



Mary's Meals

International charity, *Mary's Meals*, celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year, feeding some of the world's poorest children a daily meal in their place of education. **Jeannie Higgins**, co-ordinator of fundraising for the charity, describes their work.

In 2002, during a terrible famine, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow visited Malawi. He met a boy there, Edward, who had lost his father to AIDS and whose mother was now dying from the disease. When asked what his hopes were for the future, he replied simply 'to have enough food to eat and to go to school one day'. These words, the words of a child, ignited the work of *Mary's Meals*.

In 2002, *Mary's Meals* began feeding 200 children in a school in Malawi. From those humble beginnings, the charity now feeds over 2.2 million children in 20 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. The charity keeps its costs low, with a minimum of 93% of donations being spent on their charitable activities. Just €18.30 feeds a child for an entire school year. Those daily meals enable children to come to the classroom, children who may otherwise have to work, beg or scavenge for food, and gain the education that



Kids play on a street of Juba, South Sudan.

could be their ladder out of poverty in the long term.

'One meal every day for a hungry child in school, what could be more simple than that?' asks founder Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow. Indeed, this simple approach is clearly effective, with attendance rates and performance increasing dramatically with the introduction of school meals. The projects are community owned, with local volunteers being recruited to prepare and serve the meals and food being sourced from local, small-holder farmers wherever possible.

Through trusted relationships with partner organisations, the charity is well placed to respond to emergency situations, such as the humanitarian



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crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia, which has seen millions internally displaced, over a million facing famine and countless dead. Following an emergency appeal last year, a partner of *Mary's Meals* in Ethiopia (who we cannot name for their own safety) was able to coordinate a response, along with the Red Cross and five other local organisations, and assist thousands of internally displaced people with shelter and food – well before UN agencies, international or national organisations provided any assistance to them.

Sixteen months on and the conflict continues to escalate – fuel has run out, a government-imposed blockade stops food entering the region and

over a million people face famine. Hospitals, having run out of the most basic supplies, are closing and government airstrikes are becoming more frequent.

The people of Tigray are not the only forgotten victims of war that *Mary's Meals* supports. At present, the charity is appealing to the public to support their work in South Sudan – a country that has never known peace. Daily meals are also served to children in Lebanon and Syria, who have fled the war with their families. Most recently, the charity has expanded its feeding programme to Yemen, a country that has been described by the UN as 'the worst humanitarian crisis in the world', with 3 million people facing famine.

Schools and communities have been destroyed by conflict in these countries, but the arrival of our feeding programmes for schools brings both comfort and hope to children living in otherwise harrowing circumstances.

Sr Princy from MHA, a partner of *Mary's Meals* in South Sudan, sees the beginning of a brighter future: 'The food served is a great help for the children to continue their studies. They become more energetic to study. They become free from malnutrition and sickness. Family is very happy seeing all round growth of their children. Children are developing a hope in their minds for a better and prosperous future.' ❤️

To learn more about the work of Mary's Meals, visit www.marysmeals.ie.