

mary's meals

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Government funding**

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Scottish charity Mary's Meals is set to receive £5m from the UK Government in match funding, following an overwhelming response to its latest campaign from generous supporters.

The UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) uses its UK Aid Match scheme to match public donations to selected charity appeals, pound for pound, giving the public a say in how Britain's aid budget is spent.

The Mary's Meals Feed Our Future campaign initially aimed to raise £1.5m from public donations during the last three months of 2015. However, the response was astounding, with £5m donated by generous UK supporters, ensuring the maximum available in match funding from the UK government – £5m.

Partners including My Weekly, Stagecoach, and The Herald and Times Group supported the campaign, encouraging customers and readers to back the appeal.

Mary's Meals is a grassroots movement that currently reaches more than 1.1 million of the world's poorest children with a daily meal in their place of education, in 13 countries. The charity will extend its school feeding programmes in Malawi and Zambia using the cash boost from the government, as part of a three-year project to provide daily meals to thousands of children at school.

By serving a daily meal in a place of education, Mary's Meals attracts impoverished children into the classroom, where they can gain skills that will help them escape poverty in future. The school feeding programmes are community owned, with volunteers working in rotation to prepare the meals for the children.

The £5m UK Aid Match cash will be put towards a three-year project to expand and develop the charity's existing school feeding programmes in Malawi and Zambia, focusing on four districts in Malawi and two in Zambia.

The need for school feeding in both Malawi and Zambia is huge. Many families are so poor that, often, school only becomes an option for their children when a meal is being provided. In many cases, without the hope of a meal in school, children could be working, begging or even scavenging to survive. Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, founder and CEO of Mary's Meals, said: "Wherever we begin serving Mary's Meals, more children start attending school every day and children who were previously in school but too hungry to learn become able to concentrate in class.

"We originally planned a project that would cost £3m to implement (with £1.5m coming in from the public and the other half from the UK Government), which would provide meals to more than 100,000 children in Malawi and Zambia. Thanks to the overwhelming response to our campaign, we will now receive £5m in UK Government funding, so we're extending our project plans to ensure thousands more children will benefit.

"We are so thankful to our quite amazing supporters, and to the UK Government for matching those generous donations. While we are delighted that this funding boost will allow us to reach children in these particular districts in Malawi and Zambia, we remain painfully aware that many more are still hungry and out of school, not just in Africa, but all over the world.

"In fact, globally, 59 million children are missing out on their education because of poverty. So, more than ever, we remain focused on raising the next £12.20 – which is what it costs on average for us to feed a child for an entire school year – and we look forward to the day when every child in this world of plenty can receive a daily meal in their place of education."

The UK Government's International Development Secretary Justine Greening said:

“The UK Government Aid Match funding I am announcing today means that donations from the generous supporters of Mary’s Meals will make even more of a difference.”

“Mary’s Meals is an inspirational charity, helping to transform the lives of some of the world’s poorest children. Its work shows the importance of Scotland’s role in the UK’s international development effort. Working together we are helping to build a safer, healthier, more prosperous world.”

This news follows an announcement that Mary’s Meals plans to soon begin providing meals for vulnerable children in Lebanon, including many Syrian refugees. Mary’s Meals is committed to keeping running costs low, and spends 93p of every £1 donated directly on charitable activities.

Ends

Notes to editors

Mary’s Meals began in Malawi in 2002 after 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: “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 Mary’s Meals campaign.

Mary’s Meals, which began feeding 200 children in one school in Malawi in 2002, now reaches more than 1.1 million children in their place of education, in 13 countries.

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