

**ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARY'S MEALS SCHOOL FEEDING
PROGRAM AT MAYERA PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Author

YANKHO CHIYEPA

Co-Author

MR JUSTIN MAKAMO



Issued January 2026 Certificate

AR20262YQ9EQ1



ABSTRACT

Malnutrition remains a critical public health and educational barrier for school-aged children in Malawi (*UNICEF 2023*), hindering both physical development and academic potential. School feeding programs (SFPs) have emerged as a key intervention to address this challenge. This study assessed the effectiveness of the Mary's Meals school feeding program in combating malnutrition, enhancing health and improving school performance among children at Mayera Primary School in Malawi. Using a descriptive case study design with a qualitative approach, the research gathered data from a purposively and randomly selected sample of 10 participants, including pupils, teachers, school administrators and program coordinators, primarily through structured questionnaires.

The findings demonstrate that the program has a strong, positive impact on multiple fronts. It successfully alleviates immediate hunger, leading to marked improvements in pupils' daily energy levels and a reported reduction in common illnesses. This direct nutritional benefit translated into a dramatic increase in daily school attendance, which rose from approximately 75% to over 92%, as the guaranteed meal became a powerful incentive for consistent enrolment and punctuality. In the classroom, teachers observed enhanced concentration, more pro-social behavior and greater academic engagement, as children were finally able to focus and participate actively in lessons.

However, the study also identified significant operational and sustainability challenges. Daily implementation is hampered by logistical hurdles such as inadequate cooking infrastructure, unreliable supply chains and a lack of basic resources.

More critically, the program's long-term future is jeopardized by its deep dependency on external donor funding and the unpaid labor of community volunteers, creating a model vulnerable to collapse. The study concludes that while the Mary's Meals program is a highly effective and transformative short-term intervention, its enduring success requires a strategic evolution. To ensure lasting benefits, recommendations are made for fostering greater community ownership, integrating local agricultural initiatives like school gardens and advocating for supportive partnerships with local government structures. This shift is essential for building a resilient foundation that secures the program's vital role in the community for years to come.

Keywords: school feeding, malnutrition, child health, school performance, Mary's Meals, Malawi

INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition is still a critical public health challenge affecting millions of children world particularly in developing countries (*UNICEF,2023*). Inadequate access to nutritious food significantly hinders the physical and cognitive development of school-aged children. This issue not only does it affect their health but also their academic performance, school attendance and long-term life outcomes. In response to this school feeding programs have emerged as a vital intervention aimed at improving child nutrition and educational attainment. This study focuses on assessing the effectiveness of school feeding programs in combating malnutrition among school-aged children. Specifically, the study evaluates the implementation and impact of the Mary's Meals program which is an initiative that

provides daily nutritious meals to children in educational settings. The research aims to understand how consistent access to school meals influences the nutritional status attendance patterns and overall well-being of pupils enrolled at Mayera Primary School. By examining the program's outcomes and operational approach, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the role of school-based nutrition interventions in addressing malnutrition.

Background study

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), over 148 million children under the age of 18 suffer from various forms of malnutrition which affects their physical and cognitive development. School feeding programs have emerged as a critical intervention in addressing child malnutrition and improving educational outcomes. These programs provide daily meals to children attending school which not only deals with short-term hunger but also enhance school attendance and learning capacity (World Food Programme [WFP], 2022).

International studies have shown that school feeding programs contributes to reducing malnutrition and improving academic performance. For instance, a study by *Bundy et al. (2018)* found that school meal programs in Latin America and Southeast Asia led to a measurable decrease in stunting and underweight prevalence while also increasing enrolment rates and cognitive performance. Furthermore, the *Global Child Nutrition Foundation (2021)* highlights that integrated school feeding approaches when linked with local food production and health services are more effective in promoting long-term nutritional outcomes.

In Malawi, malnutrition continues to affect a significant portion of the child population, with 37% of children under five being stunted due to chronic undernutrition (*National Statistical Office [NSO] & ICF, 2017*). To combat this, school feeding programs such as Mary's Meals have been implemented to provide one nutritious meal per day to children attending primary school. Mary's Meals currently reaches over one million children in Malawi, offering porridge made from locally sourced ingredients to support both nutrition and education. Studies have indicated that the program has led to increased school enrolment, improved concentration in class and reduced dropout rates, especially in rural areas where food insecurity is high (*Kadzamira & Rose, 2003*).

Problem Statement

Malawi continues to struggle with high levels of child malnutrition, with approximately 34.9% of children under five experiencing stunted growth due to chronic undernutrition *Mary's Meals, 2022*. In response, school feeding programs like Mary's Meals have been implemented to provide daily nutritious meals to over one million children across the country, aiming to improve both educational outcomes and nutritional status. School feeding program (*Mary's Meals 2022*). While national-level studies have demonstrated positive impacts such as a reduction in classroom hunger from 87% to 13% and improved concentration among students, there remains a paucity of localized, empirical data assessing the program's effectiveness at individual schools like Mayera Primary School.

This gap in localized evidence is significant, as the effectiveness of school feeding

programs can vary based on regional factors including food security, community engagement and implementation fidelity. Without specific data from Mayera Primary School, it is challenging to determine the program's impact on malnutrition among its students. Therefore, this study seeks to assess the effectiveness of school feeding program at Mayera Primary School in reducing malnutrition, enhancing health and improving school performance among school-aged children.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main Objective

- To assess the effectiveness of the school feeding program in combating malnutrition among school-aged children at Mayera Primary School.

Specific Objectives

- To evaluate the nutritional status of school-aged children before and after participating in the school feeding program.
- To examine the impact of the school feeding program on school attendance and academic performance.
- To identify the challenges faced in the implementation of the school feeding program.

Research Questions

- What are the nutritional statuses of children and absenteeism rate since the implementation of school feeding programs?

- How has the school feeding program affected student attendance and academic performance at Mayera Primary School?
- What challenges are faced in the implementation and sustainability of school feeding programs at Mayera Primary School?

LITERATURE REVIEW

School Feeding Program (SFP)

A program that provides meals to school-going children and it is often funded or managed by government agencies, NGOs or private donors with the aim of improving nutrition, attendance and academic performance (*Bundy et al., 2009*).

Malnutrition

A condition that results from eating a diet lacking in nutrients or from the body's inability to absorb nutrients properly. It includes undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies (*WHO, 2021*).

Nutritional Status

The condition of health is influenced by the intake and utilization of nutrients usually assessed using indicators such as weight-for-age or height-for-age (*UNICEF, 2022*).

School feeding program

An international charity organisation that provides daily meals in schools for children in the world's poorest communities to encourage education and reduce hunger (*Mary's Meals, 2023*).

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology that was used in this study. It outlines the research design, research setting, target population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, pilot study, data analysis procedures and ethical considerations. The goal was to ensure that the study was conducted in a systematic, reliable and transparent manner, allowing meaningful insights into the effectiveness of school feeding program at Mayera Primary School in addressing malnutrition among school-aged children.

According to *Kothari (2004)* research methodology refers to the structured approach used to investigate a problem, encompassing the techniques and tools for data collection and analysis by carefully designing the research process. This study aims to produce findings that are credible, replicable and applicable to similar contexts.

Research Design

A research design serves as the blueprint for how a study is conducted, guiding the procedures for collecting, measuring, and analyzing data (*Creswell, 2014*). This study adopted a descriptive case study design which is particularly useful for providing a detailed and accurate picture of a real-world phenomenon (*Yin, 2018*).

A case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific intervention within its real-life context. Mayera Primary School was selected as the case study site due to its active participation in the school feeding program. This approach enabled the researcher to examine the implementation, challenges and outcomes of the program in a

holistic manner capturing the qualitative experiences.

Research methodology

The research setting refers to the specific environment in which a study takes place, including its physical location, socio-economic conditions, institutional characteristics and cultural context. Understanding this context is critical, as it shapes the relevance, feasibility and interpretation of the study's outcomes (*Creswell & Creswell, 2018*). This study was carried out at Mayera Primary School, a government-supported school located in the southern region of Malawi.

The target population refers to the full group of individuals whose characteristics are of interest to the study and to whom the research findings aim to apply (*Creswell & Creswell, 2018*). A well-defined target population helps ensure that the results are relevant, reliable and meaningful. For this study, the main target population comprised of all school-aged children enrolled at Mayera Primary School who benefit from the school feeding program done by Mary's meal

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a portion of the population to participate in a study, with the goal of drawing meaningful conclusions about the entire group (*Creswell & Creswell, 2018*). Because it is often impractical to include everyone in a study, careful sampling ensures that the selected participants fairly represent the wider population. In this research, a combination of purposive sampling and simple random sampling was used.

Purposive sampling, sometimes called judgmental sampling is a non-random method where participants are chosen based

on specific characteristics or roles relevant to the study (*Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016*). For this study, it was used to select school administrators, teachers and food program coordinator these individuals were selected because of their direct involvement with the school feeding program and their ability to provide meaningful insights into how the program is run and its impact on students.

On the other hand, simple random sampling was used to select learners, this method ensured that each child in the school has an equal chance of being included in the study (*Kumar, 2019*). A list of all enrolled students was obtained from the school and participants were selected using a random number generator. This helped to eliminate selection bias and ensured that the sample is representing the student population.

By using both sampling methods, the study captured perspectives from both the program's beneficiaries and its implementers.

The sample size refers to the total number of individuals selected to participate in a study (*Creswell & Creswell, 2018*). Choosing the right sample size is essential. Too small, the findings may lack depth or reliability and if it is too large, the process may become unnecessarily complex and costly (*Kumar, 2019*).

10 participants comprising of 3 learners, 2 teachers, 3 school staff members and 2 staff members from Mary's meal.

Research instruments are the tools used to collect data in a study. These tools must align with the research design and objectives to ensure that the data collected is accurate and meaningful (*Creswell & Creswell, 2018*).

Given the qualitative nature of this study, qualitative instruments were used.

A questionnaire is a list of questions or items used to gather data from respondents about their attitudes, experience or opinions (*pritha bhandar, 2021*). A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from school children. It included closed-ended questions and focused on How often they receive school meals, Changes in hunger, focus and energy, students Attendance before and after the meals program and also Self-reported academic performance.

An observation checklist was used during school visits to record first-hand information on the Meal quality and quantity, Hygiene and food handling, Student behavior during meal times and Efficiency of meal distribution. This instrument helps to verify the information collected from questionnaires and interviews (*Kawulich, 2005*).

A pilot study refers to a small-scale preliminary investigation carried out before the main research begins. It is intended to assess the practicality and effectiveness of research tools and procedures, and to identify potential challenges that could arise during the main study (*Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001*). Essentially, it helps ensure that the research design is sound and that the instruments used such as questionnaires, interview guides and observation checklists are both valid and reliable. The pilot study was conducted at a school similar to Mayera Primary School Ten participants took part. These participants were selected purposefully to ensure they provide meaningful feedback.

Data analysis is the process of organizing and interpreting collected data to uncover patterns, relationships and insights that help answer the research questions (*Creswell &*

Creswell, 2018). In this study, a qualitative approach was used, so thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

Ethics are central to any research involving human participants. This study followed key ethical principles to protect the rights, safety and dignity of all those involved.

Before participating, all individuals were informed about the nature and purpose of the research. Children were given age-appropriate explanations and assent forms, Parental or guardian permission was also obtained. Participation was entirely voluntary and individuals were given opportunity to opt out at any stage without any negative consequences.

Participants' identities were protected through coded responses and no real names were used in the final report. All data was securely stored and only accessible to the researcher. When presenting quotes from interviews all identifying information was removed to ensure anonymity.

Children were treated with particular care in line with child protection standards. All tools adapted their comprehension level and interviews were conducted in a safe and comfortable environment. Teachers were present when needed to ensure a supportive setting.

The study received ethical clearance from the appropriate institutional ethics committee. Additional permissions were secured from Mayera Primary School's head teacher and school feeding program representatives

This chapter outlined the methodology that was used in assessing the effectiveness of the school feeding program at Mayera Primary School. A qualitative design was employed, qualitative tools like questionnaires were used.

RESULTS

The study collected information through structured questionnaire and 10 people were used in order to find the real helpful information that the study was looking for. The study wanted to get information from people that have the first hand information that is to say that the study wanted to get information from everyone that is involved. The study found the information from students who eat the food, teachers who see them in class, school leaders who manage the school and the coordinators who run the program. Everyone that was asked agreed to answer to the questions which was very helpful.

The study will share the findings for each goal. The study has used many direct quotes from the people that answered the questions. After each finding the study has explained what it means in simple terms. Finally, the study has a discussion section. This section has put all the findings together and explain what the big picture is. It has also connected the findings to other similar studies.

Response rate

All 10 responders agreed to take part in the study agreed. This is called a 100% response rate. It is very good because it means the study found the right information that was needed. The chose these specific people on purpose. The study wanted to get a full picture of the program from every angle. By talking to students, teachers, managers and the coordinators themselves it makes the study's findings more true and reliable.

Participants

3 students, 2 teachers ,3 members of staff (school administrators) and 2 members of staff from Mary's meals (coordinators).

Hearing from students, teachers, managers and the coordinators themselves helps the study understand the program from all sides. The students talked about how the food makes them feel. The teachers talked about how the children behave in class. The school leaders talked about changes in the whole school like attendance numbers. The coordinators talked about the good things and the hard things about organizing the food every day. Putting all these views together gives the study a strong understanding of what is really happening.

Presentation of Research Findings

- **To evaluate the nutritional status of school –aged children before and after participating in the school feeding program Children are not hungry and have more energy.**

The biggest change everyone mentioned was that children are no longer hungry at school. Before the program, many children came to school with empty stomachs. This made it very hard for them to learn. Students explained how this feels in their own words. One student in Standard 4 said, *"Before, my stomach would be noisy in class. It would growl and make me feel shy. I could only think about food and when I could eat. Now, after the porridge, I feel calm and full. I can look at the teacher and listen to what she is saying."* A Standard 7 student added more detail, *"The headache I used to get from an empty stomach is gone. I don't have to press my head on the desk anymore to try and stop the pain. Now I can sit up straight."* According to the research done by *Jyoti, frongillo and jones (2005)* documented how

food insecurity causes physical discomfort and preoccupation that severely impedes classroom focus.

The teachers saw this change from the outside. They watch the children every day. One teacher said, *"You used to see children looking tired and lazy, especially before break time. Their eyes would be half-closed. They would not respond when you asked a question. Now, they have energy from the morning. They sit up. They raise their hands. They are really here in class, not just their bodies but their minds too."* Another teacher noticed the change in playtime *"Even during break, they play more. Before, many would just sit under a tree because they were too weak. Now they run and play football."* This statements are in line with *Grantham-McGregor, Chang and Walker (1998)* whose studies showed that undernourished children often appear lethargic and disengaged.

This finding shows the program does the most important thing first which is it stops hunger. As *Pollitt (1995)* argued, the cognitive function of a hungry child is compromised, making learning nearly impossible. Hunger is a powerful feeling. When a child is hungry, that is all they can think about. Their brain cannot focus on numbers or letters. By giving a morning meal, the program takes that problem away. The children's bodies feel better (no headaches or noisy stomachs). Because their bodies feel better, their minds are free to think about schoolwork. The teacher's comment about them being *"really here"* is very important. It means the children are now ready and able to learn. You cannot teach a hungry child. This program makes sure the children are not hungry, so teaching can begin.

Children seem healthier and get sick less.

The benefits go beyond just not being hungry for a few hours. Children are also getting sick less. This means the food is helping their bodies become stronger over time. One student said, "I used to get coughs and colds many times in a term. My mother would say I was weak. But since we started eating porridge at school, I have been strong. I don't get sick as much as before." The Deputy Head teacher noticed this trend in the whole school "We see fewer children coming to the office to ask for exit letters. Before, many children would come in the morning complaining of dizziness or general weakness. We often knew it was because they had no food. Now, those visits are much rarer." Neumann, Bwibo and Sigman (2003) found that school feeding can reduce common morbidity in children.

This finding proves that the daily porridge does more than just fill stomachs for a short time, it helps build stronger, healthier bodies. Getting sick less often is a big deal. Every time a child is sick, they miss school. They also fall behind in their work. If the porridge has vitamins and nutrients that help their immune system, then they stay healthier. This means they are in school more days of the year. The coordinator's word "*stamina is key. It means the children are not just "not hungry,"*" they have positive energy to do things. They can learn, play and help at home better. This shows the program helps with overall child development not just solving the immediate problem of morning hunger.

- **Children miss school much less because of food.**

Because there is now a reliable meal at school, children come every day. They have a strong reason to come. A student explained his old choice very clearly "*Why would I walk far to school if there was no food? It's a long walk and I would be tired and*

hungry. Sometimes I would go to the river to look for food or to do small jobs instead if I was too hungry. School did not seem important then." Now, his thinking has completely changed. He says, "Even if there is no food at home in the morning, I know I will eat at school. My mother tells me to go to school to get the porridge. So I always come. I never miss now." A research done by Kazianga, de Walque and Alderman (2012) demonstrated that school meals act as a powerful incentive for enrollment and regular attendance.

The Head teacher said, "*Before the program, our records show that about 75 out of 100 children came to school each day. That means 25 were missing every single day but after the program started, more than 92 out of 100 come every day. The change is biggest in the younger classes, Standard 1 to 4, where hunger was the biggest problem keeping them at home.*" The Senior Teacher added, "*We used to spend the first hour marking who was absent and then sending older pupils to fetch some from their homes. Now, that rarely happens. The class is full when the bell rings.*" As McEwan (2013) and Adelman, Gilligan, and Lehrer (2008) have shown, reliable food at school significantly increases daily attendance rates. This finding powerfully illustrates the principle that, for poor families, education and nutrition are inseparable addressing the latter is a prerequisite for achieving the former.

This finding is perhaps the most powerful one. It shows that food is a more powerful reason to come to school than anything else for many of these children. For a hungry child, the need to find food is more urgent than the need to read. The program changes this by bringing the food to the school. The school becomes the place where their basic need is met. The Head teacher's numbers are the proof. A jump from 75% to 92% daily

attendance is a huge change. It means hundreds more days of education for the children each year. It turns school from a maybe into a must. It shows that you cannot separate education from basic life needs. The program successfully connects the two.

To examine the impact of the school feeding program on school attendance and academic performance

- **Children arrive early and more children join the school.**

The promise of food does not just make children come, it makes them come early. They are excited and do not want to miss out. A student said, *"We all try to come early. If you are late, you might be at the back of the line and the food could finish. No one wants to miss it. So we run to school. Even my friends who used to be late always are now early."* A teacher confirmed this new habit *"The school yard is full of children by 7:00 AM. The official start time is 7:30 AM. We can start our lessons on time with everyone here and settled which was a constant struggle before. The whole morning is more peaceful and organized."* Vermeersch and Kremer (2005) noted that the promise of food can improve punctuality, leading to a more orderly start to the school day.

This finding shows that the program helps the whole school run better. It solves practical problems like lateness and a chaotic morning. When children are on time, teachers can teach more. But the bigger effect is on the school's reputation. Parents are the key. If they believe the school is good for their child, they will send them. The feeding program is a clear, visible sign that the school is doing good things. It builds trust. More children enrolling means the program is not just helping current

students but it is attracting new students to get an education. This is how the program helps the whole community move forward.

- **Children can concentrate and learn better.**

When children are not hungry, they can focus their minds. This changes everything in the classroom. A teacher described the change in her class *"Before, children would be sleepy and distracted by the second lesson. Their minds were elsewhere. Now, they pay attention from the start. They follow instructions the first time. They even ask good questions like 'why does this happen?' and 'how can we solve this?'". They are truly thinking and engaging with the lesson, not just sitting there."* A student explained how it felt from the inside *"When my stomach is full, the words in my book stay still. Before, they seemed to move around the page and I couldn't catch them. I can read a paragraph and remember what it said. I can also do my math work faster because I can think clearly. align with findings by Tan, Lane, and Lassibille (1999), who associated school feeding with better cognitive and academic outcomes.*

The Senior Teacher also noted a big improvement in classroom behavior *"There are fewer fights and arguments between children. A hungry child is often a grumpy and impatient child. They would snap at their friends over small things. Now, the classroom is more peaceful and cooperative. Children share pencils more easily. They work in groups better. This calm environment is good for learning together."* Another teacher said, *"I can now give them more challenging work. Before, I had to keep it very simple because they couldn't focus. Now, I see they are capable of more."* Sorhaindo and Feinstein (2006) reported that better-nourished children tend to exhibit more pro social behaviors.

A peaceful, focused classroom is the best environment for learning. You cannot have good learning in a chaotic, angry or sleepy classroom. The program creates the right environment by meeting the basic physical need for food. When the physical need is met, the child's brain is free to work on higher things like reading, math and asking questions. The teacher's comment about "truly thinking" is crucial. Education is not just about memorizing facts but it is about understanding. The program helps create the conditions for real understanding. Better behavior also means the teacher spends less time solving fights and more time teaching. This means every child gets more teaching time every day. The program helps improve the quality of education, not just the number of children in the room. Alderman and Bundy (2011) argue, where a calmer environment allows teachers to focus on instruction rather than discipline, thereby improving the quality of education for all.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings tell two main stories. The first story is very positive and clear. The Mary's Meals program works very well at Mayera School. It does exactly what it was designed to do. It makes children healthier by stopping their hunger and giving them energy. This good health makes them come to school regularly. Once they are in school, not being hungry allows them to concentrate, behave well and really engage in learning. This matches perfectly with what other studies from around the world have found. School feeding is one of the best and simplest ways to improve education in poor communities. It tackles the problem right at the root. The study proves this is true at Mayera School. The above information confirms the program's transformative effectiveness, mirroring global evidence that school feeding program is a powerful

intervention for health, attendance and learning (*Kristjansson et al., 2007*).

The second story is about the problems underneath the success. This part is very important for the future. The program is like a beautiful plant that is not planted in strong soil. The daily struggles with cooking no pots, no water, no firewood show that having the food is only half the battle. You need the tools and systems to deliver it reliably every single day. The constant worry about money and volunteers is an even bigger problem. A program that depends on the kindness of strangers and the unpaid hard work of poor community volunteers is not stable for the long term. It is stressful for everyone involved because they know it could end at any time. The operational and financial vulnerabilities are significant, demonstrating that, as *Gelli et al. (2019)* caution, effective delivery is as important as the food itself.

The good news from our study is that the people involved are not just complaining. They are thinking of solutions. Their ideas like starting a school garden to add vegetables and asking the local government for help show they want to find a way forward. They want the program to continue. For the program to survive for the next ten years, it must change. It must move from being a gift or a project from outside to being a normal part of school life that the school and community own and support themselves, with help from their own leaders and government. This change is hard, but it is necessary.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study presents two important facts about the Mary's Meals program at Mayera Primary School. The

first fact is that the program is a highly effective and transformative intervention. It works exactly as intended. By reliably providing a daily meal, it directly addresses the fundamental issue of child hunger. This single action creates a powerful chain reaction improved physical well-being leads to an increase in school attendance, which in return it creates the necessary conditions for effective learning. The program proves that in a context of poverty, education and nutrition cannot be separated. You cannot teach a hungry child therefore this program ensures the children are fed, healthy and present ready to learn.

The second fact is that this success is fragile. The program's current model is not sustainable. Its heavy reliance on external financial support and unpaid local labour are critical weaknesses. The operational challenges, like lack of cooking pots, are more than just inconveniences they are symptoms of a program operating without a secure, long-term foundation. Therefore, the overall conclusion of this study is that while the Mary's Meals program delivers exceptional short-term benefits, its long-term survival and impact are uncertain. For the program to truly serve these children for years to come, it must evolve. It needs to transition from being a donor-funded project to a more resilient initiative that is owned, supported and sustained by the local community and integrated into local systems.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions above, the following recommendations are made. They are directed at different groups who all play a part in the program's future. These suggestions aim to solve the immediate problems and build a stronger foundation.

Recommendations for Mayera Primary School Management

The school leadership must take active steps to secure the program's future within the school community.

- Establish a Program Sustainability Committee this is to say that form a small team comprising the Senior Teacher, two dedicated parent volunteers and a community leader. This committee's job will be to meet monthly to monitor challenges, plan solutions and communicate with donors and the local government.
- Launch a School Nutrition Garden and use a defined plot of school land to start a vegetable garden. Pupils can learn basic agriculture as part of their science lessons and the products can be used to supplement the daily porridge. This will improve dietary variety, teach valuable skills and reduce dependency.
- Formalize and Support the Volunteer System, to address volunteer burnout, the school should officially recognize their contribution with a yearly certificate of appreciation, create a clear, rotating schedule so cooking duties are shared fairly among a larger group of parents and explore non-cash incentives, such as allowing volunteers to take home a small portion of vegetables from the school garden.

Recommendations for Mary's Meals Program Coordinators

The coordinators can use their position to strengthen support and planning by

- Advocate for Essential Infrastructure, present the findings

on operational delays to the Mary's Meals head office. Request a specific small grant or in-kind donation to provide the school with t additional large cooking pots and fuel-efficient cook stoves.

- Develop a Simple Contingency Plan, work with the school to create a one-page What If? plan. This plan should outline steps to take if a food delivery is late, such as using a small emergency fund to locally purchase a backup meal for that day to maintain trust.
- Facilitate a Peer Learning Visit, use the Mary's Meals network to connect the Head teacher and volunteers with a similar school that has successfully started a garden or manages volunteers well. A visit or virtual meeting can provide practical proven ideas.

Recommendations for the Community and Local Government

Long-term sustainability requires broader local ownership and systemic support.

- Community Mobilization, the Village Development Committee should officially recognize the school feeding program as a vital community asset. They can help organize a monthly community work day to collectively gather and store firewood for the school, relieving the burden on individual volunteers.
- Strategic Advocacy to Local Government, the School Management Committee, supported by the Head teacher, must compile a formal advocacy report and a simple request for the District Education

Office to consider a financial form of support.

REFERENCES

1. Alderman, H., & Bundy, D. (2011). School feeding programs and development: Are we framing the question correctly? *The World Bank Research Observer*, 27(2), 204–221.
2. Bundy, D. A. P., de Silva, N., Horton, S., Jamison, D. T., & Patton, G. C. (2018). Child and adolescent health and development: Realizing neglected potential. In D. T. Jamison, H. Gelband, S. Horton, P. Jha, R. Laxminarayan, C. N. Mock, & R. Nugent (Eds.), *Disease control priorities* (3rd ed., Vol. 8). The World Bank.
3. Galloway, R., Kristjansson, E., Gelli, A., Meir, U., Espejo, F., & Bundy, D. (2009). School feeding. Outcomes and costs. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, 30(2), 171–182.
4. Gelli, A., Espejo, F., Shen, J., & Kristjansson, E. (2010). The costs and outcomes of school feeding programmes in low-income countries. In N. Bottani & A. Tuijnman (Eds.), *The Economics of Education* (pp. 415–424). Elsevier.
5. Grantham-McGregor, S. M., Chang, S., & Walker, S. P. (1998). Evaluation of school feeding programs: Some Jamaican examples. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 67(4), 785S–789S.
6. Jomaa, L. H., McDonnell, E., & Probart, C. (2011). School feeding programs in developing countries. Impacts on children's health and educational outcomes. *Nutrition Reviews*, 69(2), 83–98.

7. Kristjansson, E. A., Robinson, V., Petticrew, M., MacDonald, B., Krasevec, J., Janzen, L., Greenhalgh, T., Wells, G., MacGowan, J., Farmer, A., Shea, B. J., Mayhew, A., Tugwell, P., & Welch, V. (2007). School feeding for improving the physical and psychosocial health of disadvantaged elementary school children. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2007(1), CD004676.
8. McEwan, P. J. (2013). The impact of school feeding programs on educational outcomes. Evidence from a randomized trial in Honduras. *Economics of Education Review*, 32, 78–91.
9. Neervoort, F., von Rosenstiel, I., Bongers, K., Demetriades, M., Shacola, M., & Wolffers, I. (2013). Effect of a school feeding programme on nutritional status and anaemia in an urban slum: A preliminary evaluation in Kenya. *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics*, 59(3), 165–174.
10. Neumann, C. G., Bwibo, N. O., & Sigman, M. (2003). Final report. Functional implications of malnutrition, Kenya project. Human Nutrition Collaborative Research Support Program (CRSP).