Beat: News

Marys Meals helps children return to class in Ebola-hit Liberia

School feeding programme

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USPA NEWS - Mary´s Meals school feeding programme helps children return to class in Ebola-hit Liberia. 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 reintroducing 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.

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