Mary’s Meals welcomes the Scottish Government’s enquiry into how Scottish organisations can engage effectively in a globalising world and its commitment to mapping and understanding these activities.

- What international activities are happening now in your sector and/or organisation? Please describe how and why these activities take place. Are other sectors or organisations involved? What do these activities contribute or achieve?

Mary’s Meals is an international school feeding charity which delivers school feeding programmes in 12 countries around the world. We are currently feeding 989,791 children through projects in Benin, Burma, Ecuador, Haiti, India, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, South Sudan, Thailand, Uganda and Zambia. Mary’s Meals was founded by our Chief Executive, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow in 2002 and has grown steadily since then. We hope to be able to reach the significant milestone of feeding one million children by May 2015.

Mary’s Meals’ largest programmes are operated through our four affiliate organisations Mary’s Meals Kenya, Mary’s Meals Liberia, Mary’s Meals Malawi and Mary’s Meals Zambia and we also work with ten partner organisations, the largest being Mary’s Meals’ partners in Haiti, India and South Sudan. In Malawi, Mary’s Meals is currently feeding 740,712 children at 571 schools, which represents 26.5% of Primary School age children in Malawi.

This graph illustrates the growth of Mary’s Meals’ programmes since 2002.

Mary’s Meals’ programmes are focussed on providing a daily meal at school to help remove the barriers which prevent children accessing school and engaging in their education, working directly with children but also at community and national levels.

Our school feeding programmes are delivered in partnership with local communities, who manage and deliver the programmes at each school. Mary’s Meals engages with the community, provides training, kitchens, serving equipment, utensils and food and the school and volunteers are responsible for organising each project, preparing the food and serving it to the children. In our country programmes, Mary’s Meals School Feeding Officers visit schools at least twice a week and provide mentoring and support to the schools and volunteers, ensure that any issues are quickly identified and resolved, and capture essential monitoring data. They also provide training and information to all volunteers at each school community, on a range of issues including food preparation, health and safety, and hygiene procedures. In Malawi alone, our work is supported by over 65,000 volunteers.

The key changes our school feeding programmes seek to achieve are:
1. Reduced hunger for children living in poverty who attend school
2. Increased access to primary education for children living in poverty
3. Improved engagement in primary education of children living in poverty
4. Increased progression within primary education by children living in poverty
5. Improved health and well-being of children living in poverty

Our strong emphasis on volunteering and community ownership encourages local support for education and by purchasing local food wherever possible, we aim to contribute to the national economy and improve local livelihoods. By providing a lasting physical infrastructure, establishing and training strong school feeding committees which own and manage each project and working closely with national governments on school feeding design and policy, we are working to ensure that our projects are sustainable for the long-term.

At a secondary level, we therefore aim for our programmes to impact on:
6. Increased support for education within vulnerable communities
7. Improved livelihoods for disadvantaged smallholder farmers
8. Support and replication of effective school feeding programmes by Governments.

Mary’s Meals is a global movement of people who share our vision of providing a daily meal in a place of education to every child who needs it. We are currently supported by affiliate organisations working to raise funds and awareness of our work in Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the USA, with our Head-quarters based in Dalmally, Scotland. Mary’s Meals consists of, respects and reaches out to people of all faiths and none.

- Do you think your sector and/or organisation is effective in participating in international activities? If not, what would help you to make improvements? What prevents you from making improvements now?

Mary’s Meals has over twelve years’ experience of delivering school feeding programmes and is now recognised as a world leader in the delivery of a community based approach to school feeding programmes. We have continuously developed and refined our approach so that we are reaching as many children as we can, in the most efficient, effective and sustainable way. The global cost to feed a child for a year is £12.20, demonstrating the efficiency of our high impact, low cost delivery model.

An entire generation of children have now completed their whole primary education with Mary’s Meals. These young adults are more likely to feed themselves and their families in future and more likely to send their own children to school. Teachers are often eager to tell us of the transformations they see in students receiving Mary’s Meals. As well as being healthier and happier, they have improved attendance and concentration levels in class.

We have seen consistent rises in school enrolment following the introduction of Mary’s Meals. This increases dramatically within the first year, and continues to grow as our school becomes an established part of school and community life. Our most recent research from Malawi shows a 24% increase in enrolment and 10% increase in attendance, six months after the introduction of feeding. Long-term data trends from Mary’s Meals’ Malawi programme beginning in 2008, show that enrolment increases by an average of 30% three years after the introduction of Mary’s Meals. In Liberia, where only 41% of
children are in school, enrolment increases can be even higher and we have experienced increases of more than 50% across large numbers of schools, within the first year of introducing Mary’s Meals.

- **What should organisations in Scotland do to be effective internationally? Are you aware of any good examples of this from Scotland or another country?**

The key elements of our model we believe are integral to our effectiveness are:

- **Inclusive approach.** All of our projects provide one nutritious daily meal to every child in a place of education. This promotes the inclusion of vulnerable children and helps foster the spirit of community within each school.

- **Needs assessment.** Our programmes target the poorest and most vulnerable children. Mary’s Meals field staff conduct ongoing research and regularly meet with local government and education authorities to assess where need is greatest taking into account factors including high levels of food insecurity, poverty, child malnutrition as well as low enrolment and attendance rates.

- **Long-term aims.** All of our programmes focus on enabling children to enrol in school and our aim is to help children to access and actively engage in education, so that they can progress between grades and ultimately complete a full course of primary education. By working closely with the community and demonstrating the positive effects of education through our projects, our programmes also work to increase local and national support for education.

- **Long-term commitment.** We are willing to make a long-term commitment where appropriate, meeting vulnerable children’s immediate needs while supporting the transition towards our aim of handing over our programmes to national Governments in future. We believe that this approach of taking time to understand local contexts and respectfully listening to children and communities’ needs is more effective and realistic than working within three or five year funding cycles.

- **Community Ownership.** The school and local community are equal partners within Mary’s Meals in delivering our programmes and our programmes are completely dependent on volunteers. Mobilising volunteers in this way allows us to keep costs low and reinforces the community ownership of the project.

- **Alignment with Government Priorities.** We are committed to working closely with national Governments and ensuring that our school feeding programmes are aligned with Government priorities.

- **Supporting Transition to Government Delivery of School Feeding Programmes.** We also believe in building the capacity of governments in programme countries by provide advice and training to Governments on school feeding and believe that our programmes demonstrate highly effective, efficient and replicable models of best practice in programme delivery.

- **Local procurement.** Wherever possible, the food served in our programmes is procured locally. This means that we buy from local suppliers, who buy from thousands of local small-holder farmers, thereby providing support to the farmers and their families. This local procurement promotes local and national economic growth, providing an assured market for agricultural production.

- **Low cost approach.** We strive to maintain low costs, ensuring that funds can be used to maximum effect, to reach as many children as possible. At least 93% of expenditure goes on charitable work and we are very careful to keep our running costs as low as we can and not waste money on anything that is not absolutely necessary.
• **Local expertise.** We focus on developing strong organisational capacity in the countries we work in, recognising the importance of utilising local knowledge and expertise. We therefore recruit, develop and train national staff, helping to maximise the lasting local impact of our programmes.

• **Partnership.** We believe in the importance of solid partnerships to ensure that our programmes are delivered effectively. Building and maintaining strong, trusting relationships with partner organisations is fundamental to the mission and vision of Mary’s Meals and our partners are critical to the success of the global movement. Working closely with local partners also helps us to reach the most vulnerable, marginalised children, living in remote and forgotten areas.

• **Consistency.** We pride ourselves on the consistency of our programmes. Our strong logistics mean that our programmes are delivered as planned, strengthening communities' trust in Mary’s Meals and fostering ongoing support.

• **Innovation.** We continuously adapt our programme design to suit local needs and context and pride ourselves in adopting innovative new approaches wherever possible. Our experience is that the strong community relationship and resulting local support for education created by our programmes, provides a strong platform for additional projects to build on, multiplying the impact of the school feeding programme.

• **Minimising environmental impact.** We believe in the importance of minimising the environmental impact of our projects as and when technology becomes available and pilot new innovations in techniques and resources on an ongoing basis.

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