



World Vision

ENOUGH

Malawi:

**Our meals,
our voice**



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What's this about?

World Vision is leading the *School Meals Child-led Research* initiative, a unique effort that ensures children's voices are at the centre of shaping school meals programmes. Across 13 countries, children took the lead in asking questions, gathering stories, and sharing what matters most to them about school meals. They explored critical root causes, gaps and potential solutions, always through the lens of their lived experiences in schools.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys. The data collected by child researchers was analysed thematically, reflecting the priorities and perspectives of their peers.

In Malawi, this child-led research is part of World Vision's ENOUGH campaign, which amplifies children's voices in national, regional and global advocacy efforts. By listening to children and learning directly from their experiences, this initiative highlights not only the challenges faced by children in Malawi, but also their aspirations for a future where every child can thrive and enjoy nutritious meals at school.

Who we are

We are child researchers from Malawi who wanted to understand what young children think about the meals they eat at their Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres. These centres are for children aged 3 to 5 - younger than the children in other countries who took part in this project.

In total, we gathered feedback from 213 children across 11 different areas. Because the young children we interviewed could not always clearly express themselves, we also spoke to 111 ECD centre caregivers to help us understand the bigger picture.

This research is part of a bigger child-led research project that we are part of, where children across the world are sharing their experiences of school meals. **In Malawi, we looked at a special kind of school meal, a porridge made from maize flour, soybeans, milk, and sugar, sometimes with beans or groundnuts.** It's served every day at around 10am and helps children to start the day with energy and focus.



What the children told us

The porridge is popular. Very popular.

We asked the children if they preferred porridge from school or from home. **An overwhelming 94% said they preferred the school porridge. That's a strong message.**

Almost all the children - 96% - said they liked its taste. Another 96% said they liked how it smelled. Even more (97%) liked the texture. Many told us that the porridge at school tastes better than what they eat at home because it has more ingredients and more flavour.

Nearly every child said they finished their whole plate. 89% said the amount was just right, although a few said they wished the portions were bigger, especially during the lean season when there might not be food at home.



What the ECD Centre caregivers told us

Every caregiver we spoke to said that school feeding has brought more children to the ECD centres. They've seen improvements in children's attendance, learning, and energy.

97% said that school feeding has reduced absenteeism. They told us that children come to school more regularly now because they know they will get something to eat. Caregivers also said that **children have more energy to study** and are more likely to follow instructions and answer questions in class.

One caregiver said that before school feeding started, children who didn't bring food would sometimes take it from others. Now that everyone gets a meal, those problems have reduced. **Caregivers felt that this has made the learning environment more fair, peaceful, and safe.**

Why school meals matter

For the children, the porridge is more than just food - it helps them feel strong and ready to learn. They said it helps them feel full and happy. They look forward to the meal and are excited to eat it. This shows how important school feeding is - not just for nutrition, but for happiness and learning.

Caregivers told us school feeding helps children grow stronger, stay healthy, and concentrate better in class. For some children, especially during hard times, it is the only meal they get during the day.



Our ideas and hopes

The children we spoke to were proud of their school meals but shared a few ideas about how to make them even better.

Some children mentioned **wanting slightly bigger portions**. Others thought it would be good if the food could be ready a bit earlier, especially in places with a lot of children and few adults to help prepare it.

Caregivers also suggested that more people in the community could help with cooking and serving. This would make it easier to prepare food on time and make sure no child has to wait too long.

Our biggest hope is that the porridge continues and that it's extended to primary schools. We all agreed that the benefits shouldn't stop when children leave ECD centres. We want to see every child in Malawi get a nutritious meal at school every day.

Our voice matters. Our school meals matter. Our future matters.

- Child researchers from Malawi

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Special thanks to: **Dr. Patricio Cuevas-Parra, Mario Stephano**

Report curated by **Eoin O'Keeffe**

Copyediting: **Helen Shipman**

Design: **Carol Homs**

Cover photo: © **World Vision / Fyson Masina**

For further information about this publication please contact: mario_stephano@wvi.org

For more information about World Vision's School Meals, visit the [ENOUGH School Meals](#) page.

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CHILD AND ADULT SAFEGUARDING

World Vision ensured the safe and ethical participation of girls, boys adhering to World Vision's Safeguarding policy and protocols on data collection and World Vision's Code of Conduct.

Data collectors were trained on how to conduct interviews in an ethical and safe manner. Children were oriented on the possibility of withdrawing from the interview process at any moment. Informed consent was obtained for all photographs included in this report.



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