

World Vision

ENOUGH



Zimbabwe:

**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 Zimbabwe, 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 Zimbabwe, but also their aspirations for a future where every child can thrive and enjoy nutritious meals at school.



Who we are

We are a group of students from Zimbabwe who wanted to share our experiences with school meals. 128 of us participated in this research, across ten districts: Gwanda, Buhera, Makoni, Mberengwa, Beitbridge, Mbire, Rushinga, Hwedza, Lupane, and Umzingwane. Some of us are in primary school, others in secondary school, and we come from different parts of the country.

We spoke in the languages we feel most comfortable with - Shona, Ndebele, and Kalanga - so we could be open and honest about our experiences. We did this because we believe our individual voices matter. **We all took part in this research because we know what school meals are like and we want to make things better for children in Zimbabwe and beyond.**

What we found out

Not all of us in this research go to school where school meals are served. Just over half get a meal every day, mostly those in primary school. **Many secondary school students only get school meals once or twice a week, or sometimes not at all.** When meals aren't provided, learning becomes harder. Some of us feel tired or hungry in class. One student from Buhera put it simply: "I don't have enough energy to learn."

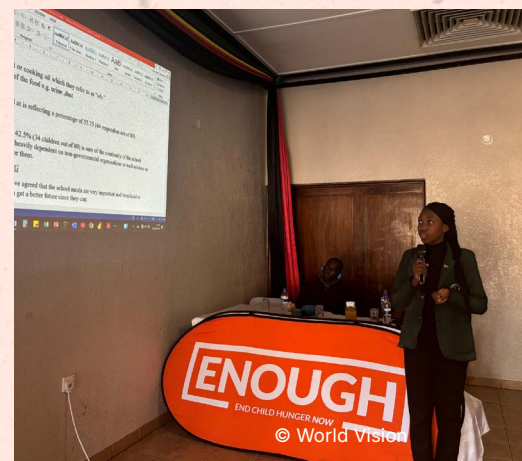
Even where meals are provided, they're not always shared fairly. Some students said that children close to the cooks, such as teachers' children or older students, receive bigger portions, while others get very little or nothing at all. In schools with long queues, those at the back frequently miss out or are given smaller portions. **Some students said the food isn't measured properly, leading to unequal servings.**

When we discussed the quality of the food, opinions were mixed. A few of us said the food tastes nice, but many disagreed. Some meals are undercooked, and important ingredients like salt and oil are sometimes missing. In Gwanda, one group mentioned that the food sometimes smells bad because contaminated water is used for cooking. **Even when meals are prepared properly, many of us still feel hungry afterwards.**

Many of us are also bored of eating the same food every day. Almost half said there's no variety - meals are usually just sadza (made from corn meal) with cabbage or bits of meat. **Schools sometimes use the cheapest or most locally available ingredients, which limits variety.** Some students said meals are poorly cooked because there aren't enough utensils or stoves, and not enough preparation time. **Even when we like the food, the portions are often too small for us to feel full.**

We also talked about the future of our school meals programme. Many of us were unsure if it will continue. Just over half said **they don't feel confident that meals will still be provided in the coming years.** A few suggested ways to make this school meals programme last longer, like starting school gardens or involving more parents in cooking. But most of us don't really understand how the programme works or who decides what happens next.

Still, despite these challenges, we agree that school meals help us learn. **After eating, we feel more energetic, focused, and ready to learn. Many of us said the meals encourage us come to school in the first place.** When we know we'll get food, we're more likely to attend and stay until the end of the day.





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What we'd change

When we were asked what changes we'd like to see, we had a lot of ideas. **Many of us want bigger portions so we don't feel hungry after eating.** We also want more variety - most of us are tired of eating the same food every day, and we'd love different options like fruits, meat, or vegetables.

Some of us suggested that students should be allowed to give feedback about the school meals. **If we are asked about what we like or dislike, we can help improve the meals for everyone.** A few of us also think that parents or community members could be more involved in the cooking process, either by helping with the food preparation or by providing support to ensure the meals are nutritious and sufficient for everyone.

Why this matters

We shared our thoughts and experiences because school meals are important to us. They're not just food - they help us stay in school, learn better, and grow stronger. **But school meals only work if every child is included, if the food is safe and filling, and if the school meals programme continues.**

We hope that by speaking out, our voices can help bring about change - not just in Zimbabwe, but in every country where children are hungry and still waiting for their meals.

Our voices matter. Our school meals matter. Our future matters.

- Child researchers from Zimbabwe

Acknowledgements

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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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