



2024 - a year of tremendous growth in Mozambique!

This year, MSLI expanded our school lunch program from 10 to 62 primary schools, reaching over 11,500 children every day! That's more than a five-fold increase in the number of students we're serving with nutritious school meals. We believe that no child should miss school because of hunger, and the whole MSLI team worked exceptionally hard this year to launch the program in 52 new schools. There are still many more children in need in the areas where MSLI works, so we hope to grow even more in 2025!



Two sisters, Sara and Alipe, enjoying lunch at Kokwe Primary School.

In addition to our partnership with Mary's Meals in Mabalane District (where MSLI serves 41 primary schools), at the end of this year, MSLI started a new pilot partnership with the Lunchbox Fund, a South Africa based school meals funder to support school lunches in 11 new primary schools in Chokwe District, Mozambique, bringing nutritious meals to 4,119 more students. These are children who have never had a school meal before, and it was great to see how excited the kids were. Even after just a week of the program, we could tangibly see the kids having more energy in the school yard – especially when the bell rings for lunch and they go sprinting to the school kitchen where the cooks have the big pots of food ready to serve.



Students lined up for lunch at 25 de Setembro Primary School - supported by MSLI and the Lunchbox Fund.

MSLI's support of local farmers

Wherever we can, MSLI prioritizes buying food directly from local farmers for the school lunch program. This ensures that the food is fresh, and it also creates market opportunities for smallholder farmers. Over the last two months, MSLI bought thousands of pounds of beans from local farmer groups, stocking up on this key ingredient for our school lunch program. Throughout the school year, MSLI also buys fresh vegetables, like beets, kale, and sweet potatoes that are seasonally available.



Farmers from Cumba village proudly showing off their sacks of recently harvested beans. MSLI purchases directly from farmers like these to supply the school lunch program with fresh, nutritious food.

What are the steps involved in starting a lunch program at a new school?

When MSLL begins our lunch program at a new school, we work closely with the community to build a strong, collaborative partnership, which is essential for effective delivery of the program. MSLL trains women to be cooks, ensuring the correct amount of food is prepared each day. Teachers also help with organizing the students, and helping serve during the lunch hour.

At the larger schools, such as Machua Primary School, with over 800 students, it is quite a production to cook huge, 100-liter pots of food over an open fire and have everything ready to serve by 12pm. The whole community pitches in by ensuring the school kitchen always has enough water and firewood to get started by 6am every morning.



Six new cooks trained and ready to prepare and serve hot meals.



Teachers keep students organized while they wait in the lunch line.



Students enjoying their school lunch in a classroom.

Leaving no child behind - even those who aren't yet in school

This year, high levels of food insecurity prompted even more young kids to tag along with their siblings to get a meal at school. These kids, just 3 or 4 years old, wait around in the school yard for hours until lunch time. MSLI's policy is to never turn any child away, even if they're not in school. But we also see the opportunity to do more for these young kids, which is why **we'll be launching a major expansion of our preschool program in 2025.**



These two youngsters are waiting patiently for a meal. Next year, they'll be able to attend MSLI's new preschool in Machua village.

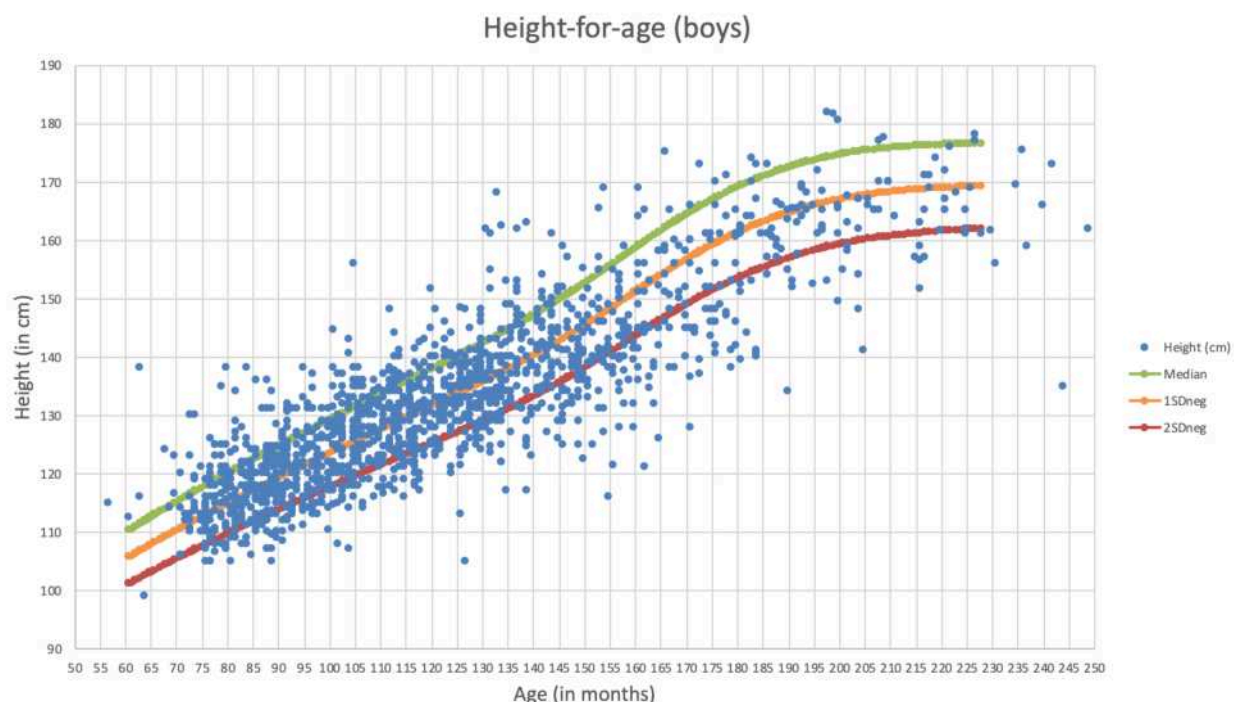


These 4-year-old girls are sharing a plate of food. While they're not yet enrolled in school, hunger prompts them to go to school to get a meal.

Student measurements at MSLI's new schools in Mabalane District show that most children have not had the nutrition they need to grow

To assess the baseline nutritional status of the students at the new schools in Mabalane District, MSLI's team diligently took height and weight measurements at all the schools. We then plotted these against the students' ages to examine their "height-for-age" relative to the World Health Organization's (WHO) standards. The chart clearly demonstrates the high prevalence of malnutrition for kids in this area, and the need for school lunch programs to get kids the essential nutrition they need. MSLI's school lunch program aims to shift this distribution, helping more kids grow up with the nutrition their bodies need to grow. But the most significant improvements will

happen if we are also able to provide nutritious meals to preschool age children - a critical window for growth and development.



This chart shows the height-for-age of boys at schools in Mabalane District. The blue dots are individual students. The lines are the WHO's standards for height-for-age, which are used to assess a child's growth. The green line is the WHO's median height-for-age, the yellow line is one standard deviation below the median, and the red line is two standard deviations below the median. Any child above the green line or between the green and yellow lines is fine. Children between the yellow and red lines are considered mildly stunted, and those below the red line are solidly stunted, which means the child's growth and development was significantly impaired from poor nutrition. This is a severe marker of child hunger, with lifelong consequences.

When a school lunch is your main meal of the day

This year, the MSLI team spent a lot of time talking to students to better understand the realities they face at home and how we can improve the integration of our programs to provide the support children truly need. Time and time again, we hear that food is the most important issue. While there are a myriad of other challenges, without food, children aren't able to focus on anything else. That's why this remains the core pillar to MSLI's approach.



During the lean season, the school lunch is sometimes the only meal of the day for kids like these in Mabalane District. Their families rely on rainfall for subsistence farming, and when the rains are late, it means that there might not be food at home.

Unrest and uncertainty in Mozambique

As you may have seen [in the news in recent weeks](#), Mozambique has been experiencing significant political and social unrest following the disputed national elections in October. This is the worst election related violence since the civil war ended 32 years ago, and has created major disruptions in the country. In the rural areas where MSLI works, schools continued functioning as normal until the end of the school year in mid-November, but we are uncertain about how things will unfold in the coming weeks. Currently, there are road blockages, border closures, and ongoing protests throughout the country. This has led to food shortages and price hikes, putting more families at risk of hunger. In such situations, we have to be adaptable, while also staying committed to the number one goal of keeping kids in school with the nutrition they need to grow and learn. During crises like these, it is more important than ever to support safety nets for children to protect their futures.



In rural areas, MSLI's school lunch program is typically the only safety net for kids, which is essential to buffer against shocks like the current political crisis.

How to support

If you're able to make an end-of-year gift to support MSLI's work in Mozambique, we would be most grateful. Each and every donation goes directly to supporting children, providing essential nutrition to students, preschool education to young kids, and mentorship for adolescents -- all part of our approach to breaking the cycle of poverty in Mozambique. Thank you for being part of our journey!

Donate directly on our website –

<https://www.mozambiqueschoollunchinitiative.org/donate>

If you'd like to **donate with a credit or debit card**, [you can do so here and just select the "Donate with a Debit or Credit Card" option.](#)

If you're **in the U.S.**, you can make a check out to "Mozambique School Lunch Initiative" and send to:

Mozambique School Lunch Initiative
5105 S. Park Lane
Spokane, WA 99223

If you're **in Mozambique**, reach out to Ahuti Kumar for the best ways to donate locally! ahuti@mozambiqueschoollunchinitiative.org

A huge thanks to all of our supporters!



MSLI's school lunches are served to thousands of kids every day. You can help us grow that number even more in 2025!

Learn more: <https://www.mozambiqueschoollunchinitiative.org/>

Follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mozambiqueschoollunchinitiative/>

Follow us on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/mozschoollunch/>

Contact: Roberto Mutisse – roberto@mozambiqueschoollunchinitiative.org

Cara Myers – cara@mozambiqueschoollunchinitiative.org