

NUTRITION IN EMERGENCIES

Saving lives today,
strengthening
systems for
tomorrow

**She's been walking for days. Her body aches
and her stomach is empty when she finally
reaches the refugee camp. With her baby slung
low on her back, she searches for a safe place
to rest and feed him. The ground is littered
with debris and everywhere she looks there
are people.**

**The task before her seems enormous:
find food, safe water and a clean place to rest
and breastfeed her baby.**



for every child, nutrition

NUTRITION AT A BREAKING POINT



The world is facing an unprecedented number of humanitarian situations today. Protracted conflicts, natural disasters and devastating food insecurity grip communities around the world, threatening lives and livelihoods – and women and children bear the greatest consequences. By the end of 2016, more than half a billion children were living in countries affected by conflict, disasters and epidemics. Humanitarian crises are often characterized by limited access to safe food and clean water as well as disruptions to basic health and nutrition services – a lethal cocktail of undernutrition.

During humanitarian crises, UNICEF's foremost priorities are to prevent death from starvation and disease and to reduce malnutrition. This work is guided by the Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action – a global framework for fulfilling the rights of children affected by humanitarian crisis. In a nutrition emergency, every second counts: a timely, coordinated response has the power to safeguard children's minds, bodies and futures.

To protect children's right to food and nutrition in emergencies, UNICEF and its partners identify and treat children suffering from acute malnutrition, provide fortified foods and supplements to prevent vitamin and nutrient deficiencies, protect and promote breastfeeding, and support families in providing safe and nutritious food for young children. In the past year alone, UNICEF responded to 344 humanitarian situations of varying scale in 108 countries – the largest number of situations and countries in more than a decade.

To say this work is urgent is an understatement. Malnutrition is deadly: a child suffering from severe acute malnutrition is nine times more likely to die than a well-nourished child. But the dire consequences of malnutrition are not always visible from the outside. Poor diets also inflict devastating damage on the inside, stunting children's growth, impairing their brain development and leaving them susceptible to disease. UNICEF's nutrition programmes aim to foster children's growth and development over the long term, ensuring they not only survive but go on to live healthy and productive lives.



Laying the groundwork for emergency response



Planning and emergency preparedness are the foundations of effective humanitarian action.

Preventing malnutrition before it starts – UNICEF works to build the foundations of good nutrition – including access to nutritious foods during pregnancy and early childhood, access to basic services and a safe and healthy environment – to keep children strong and resilient in the face of disease and disaster.

Strengthening systems and strategies – UNICEF helps governments plan for emergencies by putting the right policies, programmes and strategies in place ahead of time – and securing the human resources needed to scale up emergency response when needed.

Tracking nutrition information – UNICEF supports countries in monitoring and collecting national data on malnutrition that can help them make critical decisions before, during and after a crisis.

Identifying and managing risks – UNICEF helps countries anticipate threats to good nutrition and develop risk-informed systems and programmes that are flexible and poised to adapt when emergency strikes.

Directing a coordinated response – Within countries, UNICEF is mandated as the lead agency for nutrition, heading emergency coordination efforts in more than 60 countries. UNICEF also leads the Global Nutrition Cluster — a body tasked with ensuring a timely, well-coordinated and effective response where the scale of emergency is so large that no single agency or national authority can address it alone.



Delivering urgent treatment and care in crisis



When disaster strikes, UNICEF is on the ground delivering emergency nutrition to the children and families who need it most.

Providing leadership under pressure – UNICEF works with governments to conduct rapid nutrition assessments to identify gaps and vulnerabilities and to coordinate a plan of action among multiple partners.

Preventing hidden hunger with vitamins and essential nutrients – UNICEF provides vitamin supplementation and fortified foods to women and children – such as vitamin A, iodized salt and micronutrient powders – to prevent nutrient deficiencies and other forms of malnutrition. Supplementation boosts children’s immunity and can even save lives: for example, two-doses of vitamin A can reduce child mortality by 12-24 percent.

Protecting and supporting breastfeeding – UNICEF provides counselling to mothers and caregivers and establishes safe spaces for feeding children in times of crisis. In 2016, more than 6.3 million caregivers received such counselling with UNICEF support. Where infant formula is required, UNICEF provides monitoring and oversight to ensure it is distributed ethically.

Working to keep good nutrition inside the body – UNICEF improves access to clean water and adequate sanitation during emergencies to prevent diarrhoeal diseases, which can deplete children’s nutrient stores and leave them vulnerable to malnutrition.

Managing life-saving treatment and care – When prevention fails, UNICEF delivers urgent, life-saving treatment and care for children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. In the past year alone, UNICEF treated 2.4 million children with severe acute malnutrition in humanitarian situations.



Leading the way back from disaster



UNICEF supports countries as they rebuild and recover after crisis.

Monitoring and surveillance – UNICEF tracks the nutrition situation during emergencies and advises countries on the way forward as they transition out of crisis and improve future disaster risk reduction efforts.

Fostering resilience – UNICEF supports countries in building and strengthening policies and systems to help communities anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from shocks and stressors.

Advocating for change – As contexts shift, UNICEF helps countries adapt emergency nutrition programmes into effective long-term strategies. For example, UNICEF advocates for the treatment of severe acute malnutrition to be funded by domestic budgets and integrated into routine health services for children.

UNICEF collaborates across sectors at every stage of the process – from preparedness, to response, to recovery – in recognition of the multiple determinants of malnutrition in emergencies. Leveraging its strength as an agency with expertise across multiple sectors, UNICEF’s strategies and delivery platforms combine **nutrition, health, water, sanitation and hygiene interventions to guarantee a rapid and holistic response.**



All hands on deck: An integrated chain of response



To be effective, the national response to nutrition emergencies needs to be based on data and grounded in evidence about what works. It needs to be coordinated. It needs adequate human and financial resources. And it needs standards to ensure that services reach and impact the children and families who need it most.

Countries in the depths of crisis cannot do this work alone. They need the support of global and regional actors – a chain of response from global to country level – to guarantee that standards are translated into actions and results that uphold children’s rights. UNICEF’s regional and headquarters offices provide this critical support and oversight to the urgent work taking place on the ground.

UNICEF’s regional office takes on the role of:

Mobilizer – gathering resources, mobilizing surge capacity and deploying staff to fill gaps and support humanitarian response.

Convenor – uniting partners, engaging with regional bodies and coordinating regional strategies.

Knowledge broker – documenting best practices and lessons learned and ensuring new knowledge informs the emergency response in other countries in the region.

UNICEF’s global headquarters provides the value of:

Technical expert – gathering evidence, developing norms and standards for emergency preparedness and response and coordinating a global technical advisory body to tackle new and emerging issues;

Quality assurer – forging a clear pathway to results and ensuring the latest technical guidance is implemented in times of crisis;

Data custodian – equipping colleagues on the ground with the latest data, and monitoring and tracking the nutrition situation longer-term.





SNAPSHOTS OF EMERGENCY NUTRITION IN MOTION



Bachuy Riak, 7, stands next to his mother Angelina Nyanin, 25, holding her niece, Nyalel Gatcauk, 2, who suffers from malnutrition, during a Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) mission in Thonyor, Leer county, South Sudan. ©UNICEF/UN055446/Modola



Partnering to save lives in the most fragile communities in South Sudan

The protracted crisis in South Sudan has left children facing immediate risks of violence, displacement, hunger and life-threatening disease. In 2016, its third year of emergency response, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) provided life-saving services through 19 integrated 'rapid response mechanism' missions, delivering food rations and services to prevent and treat acute malnutrition. First launched in 2014, these missions have been pivotal to ensuring that children in remote communities cut off from services have a chance at survival. As part of the missions, UNICEF and WFP screened more than 61,000 children under 5 and more than 15,000 pregnant and lactating women for acute malnutrition and referred those in need for lifesaving treatment and care. Nationwide, in partnership with 47 non-governmental organizations, UNICEF treated more than 2018,000 children under 5 for severe acute malnutrition across the country, and more than 86 per cent of these children recovered. To strengthen care

and support for children with severe acute malnutrition, UNICEF worked with WFP to develop the South Sudan's first-ever national community-based care guidelines for children with acute malnutrition. The guidelines will accelerate care for the children most in need by allowing them to be treated right within their own homes and communities.

UNICEF and its partners worked to train health workers to better support infant and young child feeding during crisis. With UNICEF's technical support, more than 2,900 staff from NGOs and state ministries of health were trained to support mothers in crisis. And with this improved capacity, more than 735,000 pregnant women and mothers with young children were reached with individual counselling and support, while a further 650,000 men and women benefitted from group counselling. This counselling provided critical skills to improve breastfeeding practices and prevent malnutrition.



Porters and a local health official carry UNICEF-provided vaccines on difficult terrains on the way to a measles, rubella and polio vaccination campaign to be conducted at Barpak Village Development Committee (VDC) health post in Gorkha District, the epicentre of the April 25 earthquake. ©UNICEF/UNI199142/Panday



Delivering high-impact services and building resilience in Nepal

After the devastating earthquake in Nepal in 2015, the Nutrition Cluster, led by the Ministry of Health and Population and UNICEF, and comprising 28 national and international partners, devised a three-month emergency response plan to prevent malnutrition in this vulnerable population. UNICEF and the Nutrition Cluster trained more than 16,000 health workers and community volunteers to deliver a package of key nutrition interventions to more than 460,000 children under 5 as well as pregnant and lactating women. To prevent vitamin and nutrient deficiencies, more than 300,000 children received micronutrient powders, more than 360,000 received lifesaving vitamin A supplementation and more than 24,000 women benefitted from iron and folic acid supplementation to prevent anaemia. Thousands of mothers with children under 2 received on-site face to face counselling and support on breastfeeding and more than 370,000 children under 5 were screened for severe acute malnutrition.

Nepal's nutrition response to the earthquake is a case study in resilience. The effectiveness of the response was rooted in the experience, capacities and systems that had been developed prior to the emergency as part of the EU-funded Maternal and Young Child Nutrition Security Initiative in Asia programme. The emergency response made use of coordination mechanisms that had been strengthened during the previous years, highlighting the importance of including resilience building in the design and implementation of all development programmes.



A mother from Luhansk feeding her baby while taking part in the workshop “Breastfeeding and infant feeding of children in emergencies” organized by UNICEF. ©UNICEF/UNI194033/ Zavalnyuk



Protecting the rights of breastfeeding mothers and their children in conflict-affected areas of Ukraine

Breastfeeding was negatively impacted by the conflict in Ukraine, with a 2015 assessment showing that only 26 percent of internally displaced children under 6 months were exclusively breastfeeding and many mothers were not receiving adequate support from the health system. In response, UNICEF supported a capacity building workshop for health workers on supporting infant feeding in emergencies and worked jointly with other Nutrition Sub-Cluster members to monitor the distribution of breastmilk substitutes while strengthening support for breastfeeding. UNICEF's advocacy helped garner political commitment from the Government of Ukraine to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. By the end of the year, more than 73,400 mothers in conflict-affected areas had been reached with information on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding in emergencies.

In 2016, UNICEF continued to contribute to the emergency response, supporting breastfeeding counselling for nearly 44,000 pregnant and lactating women. UNICEF also helped train 800 health professionals in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, making them better equipped to support breastfeeding mothers during the crisis. UNICEF also worked to monitor and prevent the indiscriminate distribution of breastmilk substitutes, including by training health providers. With technical support from UNICEF, Ukraine's Ministry of Health established a monitoring system in 35 affected areas to better track the nutrition situation of infants and pregnant women.



Community care centres provide isolation areas and basic care for people suspected of having Ebola virus disease (EVD) who are awaiting the result of their diagnostic tests and – if their test result is positive – transfer to Ebola treatment centres. ©UNICEF/UNI178352/Naftalin



Developing urgent technical guidance to direct the Ebola response in West Africa

The 2014 Ebola crisis in West Africa sparked urgent questions about safe feeding practices for infants and young children given the lack of global norms and standards on the issue. Feeding infants and young children requires close physical contact and Ebola can be transmitted via breast milk and other bodily fluids, highlighting the need for guidance on how to guarantee safe and nutritious foods for children in this challenging context. To respond to immediate needs, UNICEF headquarters and regional offices provided urgent technical support and guidance to assist countries in the midst of crisis.

At the same time, UNICEF collaborated with WHO and other partners to develop clear, evidence-based global guidelines on infant and young child feeding in the context of Ebola over the long-term. To respond to the new guidance, UNICEF country offices procured ready-to-use infant formula and closely monitored its use and distribution while affected governments worked to modify their policies and approaches.



Bridging the gaps to drive results



Putting the emergency chain of response into action is complex, resource intensive – and it works. Yet, garnering the resources to support all actions, from country level to headquarters, has been an ongoing challenge for UNICEF.

The faces of children on the brink of starvation rightly touch the world's collective consciousness and donors are eager to fund urgent nutrition services on the ground when disaster strikes. More challenging however, has been securing the resources to drive UNICEF's regional and global actions – which ultimately prevent malnutrition and save lives – but which tend to occur behind the scenes.

UNICEF as the lead agency for nutrition in emergencies is expected to provide reliable and predictable technical expertise. This is more important than ever given the complex and rapidly changing face of nutrition emergencies.

For example, humanitarian crises are increasingly taking place in middle income countries with low breastfeeding rates (emphasizing the need to define approaches for non-breastfed children) or in settings where populations face overlapping problems of stunting, overweight and micronutrient deficiencies. During emergencies, pressing technical questions arise from countries desperate to respond swiftly to an emerging issue, such as the Ebola crisis discussed above. To support countries in responding to these issues, UNICEF will begin coordinating a global platform to tackle unresolved technical questions in humanitarian contexts. Today, one of the most immediate

gaps UNICEF faces is sheer human resource power. Regional surge mechanisms cannot function effectively without adequate surge staff. There is an urgent need for resources to support a roster of experts that can be deployed to support rapid humanitarian response.

Resources to support countries in pre-emergency planning and systems strengthening continue to be limited. Many countries move in and out of crisis over time, and the changing nature of emergencies means that fostering nutrition resilience within communities and nations has never been more important.



What will it take?



Emergencies call for rapid action at all levels to protect children’s right to nutritious food and safe and healthy environments.

Despite the rising scale and scope of emergencies worldwide, this work remains vastly underfunded.

Preventive actions in emergencies – such as support for improving infant and young child feeding – and the actions of regional and headquarters offices are particularly neglected.

We can change this. With greater investments, we can prevent malnutrition before it starts, provide lifesaving treatment when prevention fails, and build resilience among families and communities.

With predictable and flexible funding, we can give 45 UNICEF country offices, seven regional offices and headquarters the support they need to foster emergency preparedness and scale up key maternal and child nutrition interventions in humanitarian contexts. With greater funding, we can help Global Nutrition Cluster partners and governments uphold the rights of children and women even in the most trying of circumstances. We know what works – and with greater investments, we have the power to make it happen.





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