

Nutrition Sector Update



In South Sudan, USAID partner the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) provides Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) to a severely malnourished child. *Photo credit: UNICEF South Sudan.*

Bolstering Global Nutrition Assistance Through Technical Expertise

By applying global expertise on best practices for nutrition-specific interventions—such as community-based management of wasting, breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices, and the implementation of rigorous and timely nutrition assessments—humanitarian actors have the potential to significantly reduce child mortality in emergencies. Translating this knowledge into practice requires a concerted effort, particularly as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change, conflict, displacement, and forced migration exacerbate humanitarian needs. With sustained, multi-year funding, USAID/BHA supports the Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC) Technical Alliance—a global response mechanism led by UNICEF and World Vision—to improve the quality of nutrition assistance in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts by enabling and delivering coordinated, accessible, and timely technical assistance through multiple channels.

With USAID/BHA and other donor support, the GNC Technical Alliance has established critical resources to facilitate sustainable and targeted nutrition assistance in humanitarian contexts. For example, in 2020 the Technical Alliance launched the Global Thematic Working Group for Wasting, which publishes guidance for relief actors on nutrition program adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic, resources on community-based management of wasting, and global action plans to mitigate and treat wasting, among other topics. In addition, USAID/BHA funds the GNC Technical Alliance to deploy nutrition advisors in emergency contexts where additional assistance is requested. The nutrition advisors provide technical training and other capacity-building

OVERVIEW

USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) is at the forefront of the humanitarian community's efforts to prevent and treat wasting, the deadliest form of malnutrition. USAID/BHA-supported programs are community-based, linked to local health systems, and use evidence-based approaches that decrease morbidity and mortality resulting from malnutrition. USAID/BHA supported humanitarian nutrition activities to help manage acute malnutrition, as well as improve nutrition practices and services in more than 30 countries during FY 2021, including Resilience Food Security Activities implemented in eight countries. Most of USAID/BHA's nutrition programs are based in the Horn of Africa and western Africa's Sahel region, two areas where recurring droughts have severely affected communities' ability to produce and purchase enough diverse foods, thereby increasing the risk of spikes in wasting prevalence among vulnerable populations.

USAID/BHA Nutrition Funding in
FY 2021

\$649,471,442

support to local relief actors and organizations in topics such as the identification, prevention, and treatment of wasting; promoting breastfeeding and complementary early childhood feeding practices; and developing rigorous nutrition analyses that inform response plans

Building Next-Generation Leadership in Emergency Nutrition Assistance

USAID/BHA sponsors the Congressional Hunger Center’s Mickey Leland International Hunger Fellowship program, an initiative that aims to provide young and aspiring development and humanitarian professionals experience implementing field-based nutrition programming and developing nutrition policies that determine how that programming is implemented. The program utilizes a coordinated, multi-sector approach to emergency humanitarian assistance and long-term development programming by placing fellows in nutrition-focused organizations that work across the food security and nutrition sectors. USAID/BHA-funded Hunger Fellows work specifically on emergency food security and nutrition relief in humanitarian contexts to develop the critical skills necessary to address the food and nutrition needs of crisis-affected populations, while enabling vulnerable groups to build resilience and create sustainable food systems in the wake of an emergency. During the 24-month fellowship, USAID/BHA-funded fellows support humanitarian analysis, applications, policy, and studies by implementing capacity-building projects and contributing to the work of nutrition partners, including InterAction, Mercy Corps, and the UN World Food Program (WFP), among others.

Expanding Access to Treatment of Wasting Through ALIMA

In FY 2021, USAID/BHA supported the Alliance for International Medical Action (ALIMA) to expand the evidence base for the Optimizing the Treatment of Acute Malnutrition (OptiMA) program, an initiative that aims to break down the treatment barrier for children ages 6–59 months suffering from wasting. Despite significant progress over the past decade towards improving access to and the quality of treatment for wasting globally, approximately 25 percent of children experiencing wasting receive treatment. To address the continued gap in wasting treatment coverage, OptiMA is expanding access to wasting treatment by simplifying the admissions criteria for malnutrition treatment programs and providing caregiver trainings that facilitate the early detection of wasting through a single measure for screening, diagnosing, and discharging patients. OptiMA also supports the efficient use of resources to treat wasting by gradually reducing the ration of ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) for outpatient wasting treatment over the course of a child’s care as their weight gradually increases.

With USAID/BHA funds, ALIMA aims to improve wasting data platform management and analysis through two randomized control trials (RCTs) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Niger, as well as two observational studies in Chad and Mali. Since 2020, ALIMA has operated in Chad to conduct coverage surveys in the capital city of N’Djamena and in Lac Region, documenting the improved scale of wasting treatment when applying the OptiMA protocol. Meanwhile, in Mali, ALIMA is expanding OptiMA protocol implementation to new areas, such as central Mali’s Mopti Region. In 2020 ALIMA, in coordination with local implementing partners, provided medical care for wasting to thousands of vulnerable individuals and trained approximately 130,000 women in Mali to detect early signs of wasting in children using the mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) bracelet measurement. In DRC, results from a USAID/BHA-funded RCT conducted in Kasai Province show that the OptiMA protocol of gradually decreasing RUTF dosages—in accordance with improved MUAC and increased bodyweight—among children undergoing treatment for wasting proved to be a superior treatment strategy compared with the standard treatment protocol of maintaining a single RUTF dosage throughout a child’s course of treatment. These results demonstrate the safety and benefits of a modified approach to treatment of wasting in DRC that substantially increases resource availability to treat wasting for millions of

children. With sustained support from USAID/BHA, ALIMA’s work continues to generate important evidence on the best screening and treatment tools to improve the quality and scale of wasting treatment.

Developing Innovative Solutions to Delivering Sustainable Nutrition Assistance

Relief actors have adapted to increasing global humanitarian needs by developing more efficient and effective means of transporting and storing food and nutrition assistance, as well as disposing of resulting waste in a sustainable manner. Packaging is an essential aspect of delivering and protecting humanitarian commodities, but often becomes an unintended waste stream in fragile contexts where national governments lack sufficient infrastructure or management systems to appropriately dispose of waste products. Improper waste management can inadvertently exacerbate human and environmental health concerns, prompting humanitarian actors to re-evaluate their procurement and supply chain delivery processes.

Since 2017, USAID/BHA—with support from Michigan State University’s School of Packaging, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and WFP—has facilitated an annual workshop to develop packaging solutions for food and nutrition commodity warehousing and the prevention of pest infestations. An important global platform in the development of sustainable packaging, waste management, food safety, and supply chain tracing systems, the workshop has generated innovative solutions to humanitarian supply chain challenges, such as piloting bulk oil shipping to minimize waste, assessing high-performing packaging films to limit pest infestations, developing statistical process controls to reduce packaging defects, and defining standard operating procedures to monitor packaging quality compliance.

Additional information on USAID/BHA’s activities can be found at: [usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work](https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work)