



INNOVATIONS IN TREATMENT OF ACUTE MALNUTRITION: FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

TAKING THE FIGHT FORWARD



NO WASTED LIVES
IN SUPPORT OF



INTRODUCTION

Up to 50 million children a year suffer from acute malnutrition¹. This translates into approximately 2,000 children dying from its severe form every day.

Over the past 40 years, however, the treatment of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) has made huge advances. The development of therapeutic milk in 1993 enabled successful inpatient treatment in humanitarian and development contexts. Inpatient care however, was resource intensive. In 1996, the development of ready-to-use foods (RUTFs) enabled a safe and effective community-based approach to treatment.

These developments in product and delivery platforms for treatment of severe acute malnutrition reduced mortality rates, reduced costs and improved the coverage of treatment globally. **Over 4.4 million children were treated in 2017, a four-fold increase from 1.1 million children reached in 2009². But we are still falling short.** Work carried out by Action Against Hunger in recent years has used new approaches to measure treatment coverage in over 25 countries globally, demonstrating that less than 20% of children who need treatment worldwide actually receive it. Difficulty accessing treatment programmes, high opportunity costs to caregivers and funding shortfalls remain key barriers to treatment. **We must do more to ensure that all children in need have access to life-saving treatment.**



Action Against Hunger's SAM2020 Agenda aims to reach more children with treatment for severe acute malnutrition by 2020. This agenda guides our global work and is critical to supporting progress towards the ambitious targets set by the World Health Assembly and Sustainable Development Goals.

Research and innovation have played a key part in the progress that has been made to date and continues to play a crucial role towards enabling us to achieve our goal of reaching more children. As a founding member of the No Wasted Lives Coalition, Action Against Hunger has worked with global partners on innovative research efforts to build the evidence on improved approaches and platforms to reach more children with safe and effective treatment for acute malnutrition at lower cost. **Through these efforts, we have the potential to unblock critical barriers to access and delivery across humanitarian and development contexts and achieve our global ambitions.**

¹ "The State of Acute Malnutrition" (www.acutemalnutrition.org). Data sources from the WHO-UNICEF-The World Bank Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates and UNICEF Nutridash database.



TAKING THE FIGHT FORWARD

With new evidence on improved treatment approaches now becoming available, this is a key moment to call for research uptake and adoption of findings both within the Action Against Hunger network and in the wider nutrition community.

In order to reach our goal of treating more children suffering from severe acute malnutrition, Action Against Hunger calls for:

- **INTEGRATION OF SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION TREATMENT INTO HEALTH SYSTEMS**

Reducing malnutrition should be at the heart of current efforts to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Approaches should be rooted in the latest evidence on diagnosis, treatment and cost-effectiveness. The nutrition community should take the opportunity of the upcoming summit on Universal Health care in New York in 2019 to ensure that new evidence on how to cost-effectively increase coverage of severe acute malnutrition treatment services is core to plans to expand access to healthcare.

- **INVESTING FOR THE SHORT AND LONG TERM IN TREATMENT**

Donors, both domestic and global, are called on to renew and increase funding and policy commitments for treatment of severe acute malnutrition at the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in 2020. The governments of countries with high rates of malnutrition must also be supported to mobilise domestic financial resources to invest in scaling up provision of treatment services, and to access new and innovative financing sources.

- **CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN RESEARCH TO BUILD THE EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS**

It will be imperative to do more research on critical outstanding questions that need to be answered in order to support safe and effective approaches and modifications to standard treatment that include both severe and moderate acute malnutrition. This includes building the 'real world' evidence by supporting operational pilots to further test promising new approaches in different contexts and at scale.

These calls to action are based on and must incorporate the latest available evidence to inform our efforts.

CURRENT RESEARCH AND INNOVATIONS

The research portfolio implemented by Action Against Hunger with partners and in support of the No Wasted Lives Coalition have focused on the following three areas:

1. INNOVATIONS IN DIAGNOSTICS

With known limitations to the existing methods used to identify children with acute malnutrition in different contexts, innovation is important to expand our options and reach more children. This portfolio includes research on how to use current diagnostic methods at a much larger scale and in remote contexts, how to develop new tools for diagnosis like photo-based apps for mobile phones, and testing novel diagnostic and screening tools relying on the assessment of biomarkers and clinical indicators.

2. SIMPLIFIED APPROACHES TO TREATMENT OF ACUTE MALNUTRITION AND REDUCED DOSAGE OF READY-TO-USE FOODS FOR TREATMENT

Acute malnutrition is a continuum, and yet moderate and severe acute malnutrition are treated separately, with different protocols and by different organizations which can often result in inefficiencies or even blockages in care. Ready-to-use foods (RUFs) are a costly component of treatment and supply shortages are not uncommon, limiting the availability of treatment for both moderate and severe acute malnutrition. This portfolio tests the



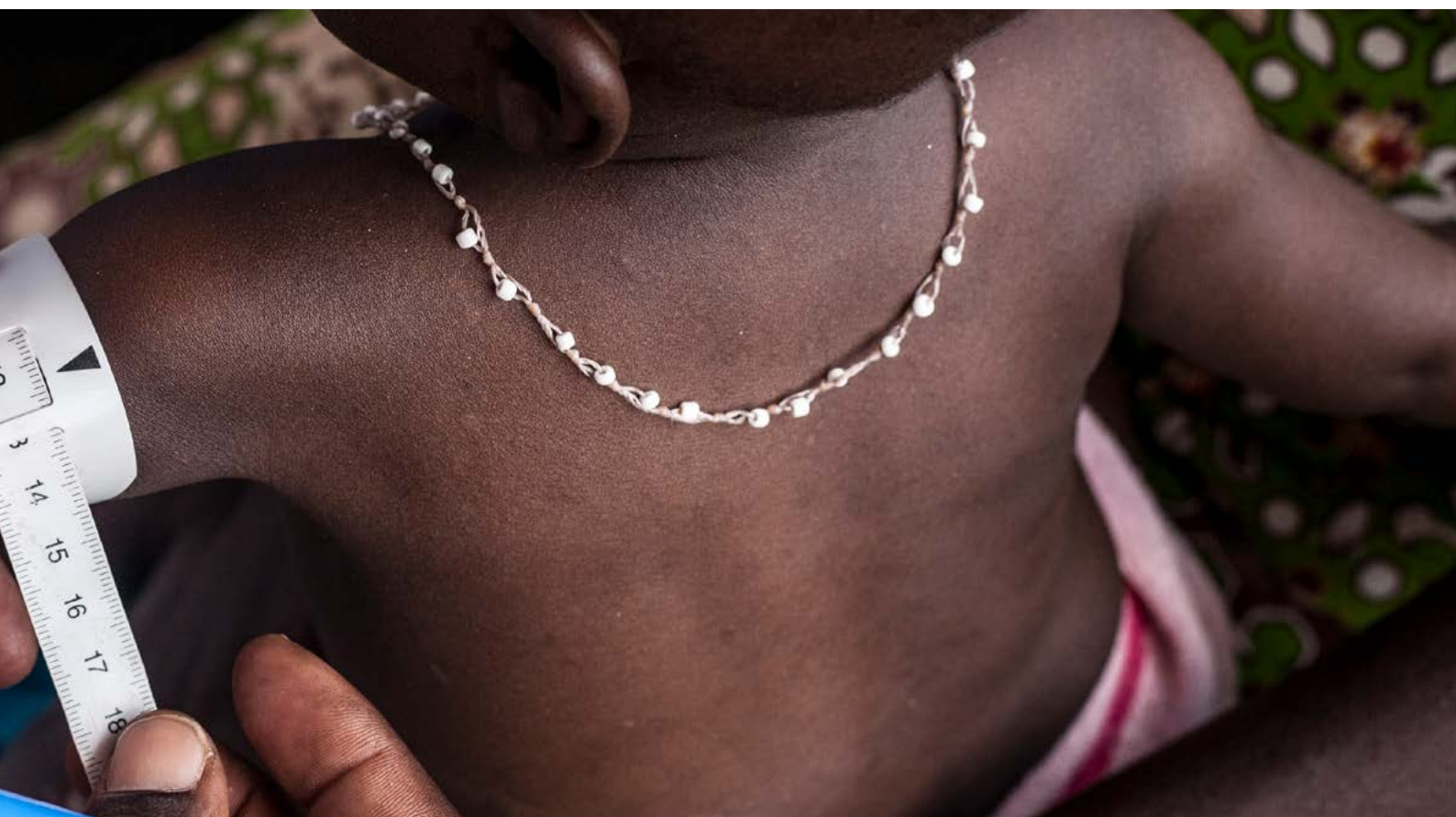
safety, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of modified and simplified approaches to address these issues by combining treatment of moderate and severe acute malnutrition and with reduced dosages of ready-to-use foods.

3. INTEGRATION OF TREATMENT OF ACUTE MALNUTRITION INTO HEALTH SYSTEMS

Treatment of acute malnutrition is often delivered in parallel to the existing health platforms, creating inefficiencies in delivery and the workforce. This portfolio examines opportunities to integrate detection, diagnosis and treatment of acute malnutrition into health systems for mothers, infants, and children. By integrating the treatment of acute malnutrition into the package of health interventions provided by community health workers for example, treatment can be brought one step closer to the communities and improve coverage and outcomes.

We are at a pivotal moment where new research and innovation can support our efforts to reach more children with life-saving treatment for severe acute malnutrition, in more countries and contexts, and with better use of resources.

It is imperative that we support the responsible translation of evidence-based approaches to operational programming at scale and ensure that we continue to learn and apply best practices.



FOR FOOD.
AGAINST HUNGER
AND MALNUTRITION.

FOR CLEAN WATER.
AGAINST KILLER DISEASES.

**FOR CHILDREN THAT GROW
UP STRONG.**
AGAINST LIVES CUT SHORT.

**FOR CROPS THIS YEAR,
AND NEXT.**
AGAINST DROUGHT
AND DISASTER.

FOR CHANGING MINDS.
AGAINST IGNORANCE AND
INDIFFERENCE.

**FOR FREEDOM FROM HUNGER.
FOR EVERYONE. FOR GOOD.**

FOR ACTION.
AGAINST HUNGER.

