

The State of Acute Malnutrition



The MUAC for Mothers Approach: ALIMA

In 2011, ALIMA began examining the feasibility of training mothers to be able to identify malnutrition in their children. They wanted to reduce the number of children presenting late for treatment for severe malnutrition (which was resulting in more complications), and improve low programme coverage.

ALIMA conducted two studies in the Mirriah District of Niger to compare mothers to trained health workers and CHWs in classifying children's nutritional status by MUAC. The first pilot study showed that after a short practical demonstration on using MUAC bracelets, there was near-perfect agreement in MUAC classification between 103 mothers and health workers. A larger study followed comparing the MUAC for Mothers and CHW screening strategies in two separate health zones. In the zone where 13 000 mothers were trained to use MUAC, malnourished children arrived for treatment earlier and required far fewer hospitalisations than children in the CHW health zone.

Early evidence of MUAC for Mothers' impact convinced ALIMA's operational and country managers to implement the approach in all of ALIMA's malnutrition treatment programmes beginning in 2016. ALIMA has already trained more than a million mothers and caretakers in more than 10 countries. To help other national and international groups implement the strategy in their own programmes, ALIMA also created guidelines conducting MUAC trainings.

Who does ALIMA train?

While mothers with children aged 6-59 months have been the priority, other caretakers and family members have been included in the training. ALIMA found that training recent mothers or soon-to-be mothers, as well as engaging husbands and fathers, can generate community acceptance.

Who trains mothers and caregivers?

ALIMA has used CHWs, former CHWs, Health Promoters, Nutrition Assistants and nurses to train caregivers on using MUAC tapes and identifying malnutrition.

CHWs continue to play an important role in promoting and delivering health efforts in a community, but utilising CHWs to train mothers how to screen in the community, rather than screening children themselves, is better suited to their skills.

What does the training cover?

Trainings are generally a mixture of short presentations and practical demonstrations. Topics covered include: what is malnutrition, how it is diagnosed and treated (using pictures, videos or drawing in support) and why mothers should screen their children. Highlighting that early detection can reduce the risk of death or the need for lengthy hospital stay has been noted to be effective. Mothers then have an opportunity to use MUAC tapes and practice measuring their children as well as checking for oedema.