



Field Exchange Special Issue on Wasting in South Asia, September 2020

Call for Content

Setting the scene

Asia is home to half of the world's wasted children (25.9 million) and severely wasted children (8.6 million), and 40% of the world's stunted children (58.7 million).¹ South Asia is the only region in the world with a 'very high' prevalence of wasting (15.2%) and an exceptionally high prevalence of severe wasting (5%). Over 80% of the estimated regional burden of wasting is concentrated in India alone, followed by Bangladesh and Pakistan (approximately 7% and 5.5% of the regional burden, respectively). Less than one in five severely wasted children are treated globally, with figures for South Asia estimated to be considerably lower. Urgent actions are needed to accelerate wasting prevention and treatment. Scaling-up the early detection and care, combined with prevention efforts, could significantly contribute to the SDG targets on wasting, stunting and under-five mortality.

The South Asian context for wasting has several unique characteristics. The prevalence and incidence of wasting in South Asia is often highest at birth and in the first months of life, and then declines with age. The majority of wasting after the first year of life occurs among children who experienced wasting in early life. Mortality risk of wasting and survival benefits of current standard treatment options in South Asia require closer examination. Countries in South Asia use varied approaches to care for severely wasted children at community level. These and other factors are fuelling scientific, policy and programme debates on the nature of an appropriate policy and programme response to wasting in this region. In some countries, these debates have stifled progress to improve access of wasted children to treatment services, while in others, developments and opportunities are emerging that provide valuable insights and are important to document and share.

The wasting agenda is inadequately reflected in national health strategies and plans of South Asian countries, and the integration of preventive and treatment services into national health and community systems remains weak. Financial investments in the wasting agenda are insufficient, with most countries in the region lacking investment cases and costed scale-up plans to help secure the financial resources needed to deliver services at scale. Wasting is often still perceived as an emergency issue and does not attract sufficient attention from governments and donors in development contexts compared to stunting. Furthermore, interaction between wasting and stunting in terms of heightened risk is poorly appreciated. In parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the scale-up of services is also limited by security-related access constraints.

In view of these multiple challenges, priorities lie in addressing the lack of policy consensus, prioritising wasting on the health development agenda, generating evidence to support a policy and programme response, and mobilising resources (financial and human) to support the rapid and sustainable scale-up of services. These issues have been discussed at events in recent years.²

To strengthen policy and programmatic response to the wasting burden in the region, there is a need to capture, collate and appraise a spectrum of learning and evidence from programming and research. This will serve to build the evidence base by making the most of what exists and identifying outstanding knowledge gaps to inform advocacy, priority actions and research agendas. As a contribution to this effort, Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) and UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) have partnered to develop a Special Issue of *Field Exchange* on *Wasting in South Asia*.

¹UNICEF, WHO and UNICEF Joint Malnutrition Estimates 2019 <https://data.unicef.org/resources/jme/>

² A regional conference "Stop Stunting | No Time To Waste – Scaling up Care for Children with Severe Wasting in South Asia" was convened by the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and UNICEF ROSA in May 2017 in Kathmandu. In November 2018, a consultation focusing on Wasting in South Asia was organised by UNICEF ROSA and took place in New York in presence of 32 experts. In addition, a United Nations summit on wasting is due to take place later in 2020, to gather major UN agencies and key stakeholders to discuss a new narrative on the care of wasting globally, including South Asia.



Field Exchange

The overall objective of this Special Issue of Field Exchange is to increase the understanding of the huge prevalence and burden of wasting in South Asia, and document the current status, gaps, innovative approaches and opportunities in the policy and programme response. The issue will include articles on programming, findings of studies and research conducted in the region, 'views' papers from key regional influencers, and summaries of recent events related to the care of wasted children in South Asia. It is anticipated that the Special Issue will support regional advocacy efforts to position wasting higher on the political agenda and guide a context-specific policy and programme response. At a global level, the Special Issue will help raise the profile of South Asia experiences in international discourse.

The print and e-edition will be released in September 2020. Content will be shared early online as it is finalised.

Call for content now open

We are issuing an open call for content and will prioritise programme experiences and research that speak to the following wasting-related **themes**:

- Epidemiology and consequences of wasting on child survival, growth and development in South Asia (including stunting and other forms of malnutrition)
- Implementation models and packages, including innovative approaches to current programme design
- Interventions to reduce Low Birth Weight (maternal nutrition and health interventions)
- Management of 'at risk' mothers and infants under six months of age
- Integration of wasting prevention and treatment into health systems and health system strengthening
- Experiences of implementing a 'continuum of care' for wasted children
- Linking humanitarian and development programming to treat and prevent wasting
- The implications of climate change for the burden of wasting in south Asia

Primary focus countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Regional content will also feature that draws from all South Asian countries, including these and Bhutan and the Maldives.

Submission process

Please send a short abstract of your proposed article (maximum 400 words) that explains how it will speak to a priority theme and key learning points. Please attach relevant reports/publications.

Please also share relevant research, news, and plans that we can highlight in the edition.

Submissions will be reviewed by the Editorial Board³ and you will be notified on decision within four weeks of submission. The ENN editors will support identified authors to develop articles.

Deadline for submission ideas: 15th March 2020

For further information please see our 'how to write for FEX guide' www.enonline.net/fex/writeforus Send submissions to Chloe Angood, Field Exchange Sub-editor at chloe@enonline.net

About *Field Exchange*

Field Exchange is an established technical publication produced three times per year by the Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN). Annual special editions complement routine online and print editions. Topics of previous special issues include the continuum of acute malnutrition care ([Issue 60](#)); the nutrition response to the Syria crisis ([Issue 48](#)) and experiences of nutrition country cluster coordination ([Issue 56](#)). www.enonline.net/fex

³ All articles submitted to Field Exchange undergo a semi-formal appraisal of their quality, technical rigour, validity of conclusions, gender equity and diversity and external plausibility by the Editorial Team. This results in a decision as to whether the article will be included, or areas that need strengthening to reach the necessary standard for inclusion.

