

Stronger evidence towards future scale up: Cluster Randomised Trial in Ethiopia



Participants in key stakeholder meeting in Addis, October, 2019

Update 1.0, November 2020

Overview

We are a consortium of two universities - Jimma University and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine a technical charity - the Emergency Nutrition Network, and an international humanitarian response agency -GOAL, working collaboratively to fulfil a vision that *“Every infant aged under 6 months, at every healthcare or community-level contact point is nutritionally assessed and appropriately supported to survive and thrive”*.

The ultimate **goal of this research** is to effect national and international policy guidance change to ensure access to community-based care for at risk infants and their mothers. Central to this is generating **high quality evidence** on an intervention that is **feasible, effective, scalable and sustainable**.

The **MAMI Care Pathway** is an integrated care approach that leverages existing health systems and services to **manage nutritionally at risk mothers and infants under six months of age (MAMI)**. Our research will test if community-based management using the MAMI Care Pathway improve the growth of nutritionally at-risk infants under 6 months using a cluster randomised control trial design.

Our study, generously funded by the Eleanor Crook Foundation with a 4-year grant, is expected to be completed by the summer of 2023, and will be implemented in health centres in Jimma Zone and Deder Woreda.

At the heart of this research are **partnerships** at sub-national, national and international levels to truly **co-create** an integrated intervention that has real potential for scale. To ensure this research generates relevant national evidence, we have and will continue to build multi-level representation and engagement in Ethiopia throughout the research process from early planning stages.

Activity update

Early **stakeholder meetings** in **Addis, Deder** and **Jimma** have informed formative research in **Phase 1 (2020 to mid-2021)** that is now underway to collect quantitative data on caseload at health centres to help improve our study design and implementation and



qualitative research to understand health workers and carer's perceptions of well-being, malnutrition and feeding behaviours of infants.

Phase 1 also includes secondary data analysis on anthropometric data from Ethiopia to inform enrolment criteria, and consultation with international policy makers, programmers and researchers to inform plans, share developments and nurture cross-country learning.

National and international stakeholder mapping in Phase 1 to identify communication tools and influencers in collaboration with SDG2AdvocacyHub is being used to inform opportunities for strategic and practical engagement on MAMI.

The MAMI Care Pathway will be piloted in the first two quarters of 2021 to examine feasibility and comprehension in preparation for Phase 2.

The randomised control trial is planned for **Phase 2 (mid-2021-2024)** due to commence mid-2021. Primary outcomes (improved weight-for-age and MUAC) will be assessed at age 6 months. Secondary outcomes include breastfeeding status, and episodes of severe illness. Maternal benefits will also be explored, such as wellbeing/perceptions of social support. Infant follow up is planned to 18-24 months. In addition, **cost and**



Participants in key stakeholder meeting in Jimma, hosted by Jimma University, October, 2019

cost-effectiveness will be examined as a core component. A **process evaluation** accompanies the formative phase and RCT for real time, responsive research and to generate evidence on pathways to sustainable scale.

On 23rd November 2020, the team presented the **research** to the annual meeting of the **Ethiopia Nutrition Leaders Network**. A series of **virtual stakeholder meetings** will be held in December in Ethiopia to continue our close partnership and inform our research. **If you would like to participate**, please contact the team (see below).

The **COVID-19 pandemic** impacted on our original research timeline and ways of working. It has limited the possibility of physical interaction between our teams and between the research team and the study population. We have adapted to this unforeseen circumstance by adapting protocols for safety and front-loading desk-based work to continue to advance in the project. We adapted timings and methodologies for Phase 1 research and have used the extended formative phase to undertake the feasibility study of the MAMI Care Pathway. We have re-scheduled the RCT to mid-2021. Adaptation has been greatly facilitated by a dedicated frontline research team in Ethiopia, regular remote team meetings, and a flexible, engaged funding partner (ECF).



Participants in key stakeholder meeting in Harar, Deder Zone, hosted by GOAL, October, 2019

Related global initiatives

The **MAMI Global Network (MAMI GN)** is an established, active community of programmers, researchers and policy-makers working to advocate for, strengthen evidence and improve practice to support at risk infants under six months and their mothers. The MAMI Global Network is coordinated by ENN, co-led by ENN and LSHTM. Members of the Ethiopia research team are active participants in the MAMI GN. The MAMI GN is a critical pathway for ensuring country-led research and evidence informs international policy and practice.

The ENN is coordinating an **update of the MAMI Care Pathway** guided by a MAMI GN working group of research, content experts and practitioners. This will be available early 2021 for feasibility testing in Ethiopia to inform contextual modifications in advance of the RCT.

WHO has initiated an **update of normative guidelines on management of wasting** for release in early 2022. ENN, in collaboration with LSHTM and lead researchers, has been commissioned to undertake a scoping review on growth failure in infants under six months of age to inform a Guideline Development Group scoping meeting in December 2020.



Welcome fire at dinner
hosted by Jimma University



Meet the team

The research partnership comprises a strong team of experienced researchers and practitioners at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) (overall lead & coordinator), Jimma University (academic lead, Ethiopia), GOAL (operational) and ENN (process evaluation and learning).

LSHTM

Marko Kerac, *Principal investigator*
Carlos Grijalva-Eternod, *Co-investigator and Research Manager*
Emma Beaumont, *Statistician & Data Manager*
Prof Elizabeth Allen, *Professor of Medical Statistics*

Jimma University

Melkamu Berhane, *Principal investigator (Jimma and Deder)*
Prof Tsinuel Girma, *Senior Co-investigator*
Prof Alemseged Abdissa, *Senior Co-investigator*
Mubarek Abera, *Co-investigator*
Bitiya Admassu, *Co-investigator*
Kiddus Yitbarek, *Co-investigator*

GOAL

Hatty Barthorp, *Research Advisor*
Anley Haile, *Research Lead*
Abdulkhakim Ali, *Research focal point*
Ritu Rana, *Co-investigator, MAMI Advisor*

ENN

Marie McGrath, *Co-investigator*

Additional expertise

Prof Jonathan Wells (UCL), *Co-investigator/technical advisor*
Dr Hannah Blencowe (LSHTM), *Co-investigator/technical advisor*
An in-country independent Technical Advisory Group provides advice and oversight.

Contacts

We welcome your engagement and contributions to this collective effort. If you'd like to know more or get involved, contact: Melkamu Berhane, Jimma University (Ethiopia) melkamuarefayine@gmail.com and Carlos Grijalva-Eternod, LSHTM (UK) Carlos.Grijalva-Eternod@lshtm.ac.uk

Further information

For more information on the Ethiopia research, including meeting reports and presentations, visit: www.ennonline.net/ourwork/research/mamiriseethiopia

For more information on the MAMI Global Network and MAMI Care Pathway, visit www.ennonline.net/ourwork/research/mami