



World Food Programme



Addressing Wasting in Children Globally

UNICEF and WFP Partnership Framework

An estimated 47 million children under the age of five suffer from wasting, which threatens children's survival, growth, and development. Child wasting can and must be prevented. UNICEF and WFP have the global reach to enact a paradigm shift that places emphasis on prevention, so children never become wasted, while accelerating actions for the early detection and treatment of wasted children.

An estimated 47 million children under the age of five suffer from wasting, a condition characterized by low weight for height that adversely affects child growth, brain development and lifelong opportunities and can cause premature death. The current COVID-19 pandemic could result in an additional 6.7 million children with wasting during the first 12 months.

Child wasting must be eliminated. This starts with prevention – ensuring mothers and children benefit from a package of targeted interventions that strengthen systems and provide improved access to nutritious and safe diets and life-saving services and practices. By scaling up prevention and innovative treatment services, UNICEF and WFP can reduce the global burden of wasting so that no child is left behind.

A focus on child wasting: urgent

In 2015, the world committed to eliminating all forms of malnutrition by 2030 as part of the SDG's, including child wasting, with a global target to keep the prevalence of child wasting below 3 per cent by 2030. However, the world is off track to reach this target. Fragmented approaches and unpredictable financing have limited the effectiveness and efficiency of the global response.

An integrated approach to reducing child wasting: a paradigm shift

UNICEF and WFP are pursuing a more purposeful, systematic, and accountable collaboration that leverages collective strengths more effectively to help countries accelerate progress in the forthcoming "decade of delivery" on the wasting-related SDG target. Such an integrated approach will strengthen national systems through a package of targeted interventions that prevent mothers and children from becoming malnourished.

This approach enables a more streamlined division of labour between the two agencies. For instance, UNICEF is well placed to leverage and support national primary health care systems while both WFP and UNICEF bring essential, operational capabilities to support prevention and treatment of wasting. Further details are outlined in the Partnership Framework matrix.

Prevention should come first, including in fragile and humanitarian contexts

For much of the past two decades, global efforts to address wasting have primarily focused on providing treatment for children with wasting, especially in fragile and humanitarian contexts, overlooking the need for preventive interventions. As a result, the proportion of children in need of treatment has not declined.

Child wasting can and must be prevented. UNICEF and WFP have the global reach and mandate to enact global change. This paradigm shift places emphasis on early prevention, so children never become wasted.

WFP and UNICEF will identify context-specific actions based on their specific strengths, supporting sustainable and resilient systems, and related capacity building of national institutions. The objective is to ensure that women and children benefit from nutritious and safe diets, essential nutrition services and positive nutrition practices to prevent wasting pre-conception and through pregnancy, infancy and childhood that sustain children throughout the entire lifecycle.

When prevention fails, early detection and treatment of child wasting is a must

In order to treat more children, more effectively, we need a paradigm shift. To this end, UNICEF and WFP will accelerate actions to support the integration of early detection and treatment services for children suffering from wasting into primary health care and other routine and community-based services for children and women, together with capacity building support. Routine early detection of child wasting as an integral part of services for children will make treatment easier, shorter, less costly, and more effective.

Growing evidence on the use of simplified approaches for the treatment of child wasting shows potential to expand treatment coverage and efficiency, and we are committed to building evidence and swiftly incorporating new learnings into our work.



The way forward

A coalition of partners for action at scale

UNICEF and WFP will redouble joint action to galvanize a coalition of partners to work with national governments and systems to reduce the global burden of child wasting and ensure that children living in fragile and humanitarian contexts have access to prevention, early detection and treatment services.

To kick-start this paradigm shift in approach to support to these most vulnerable children, WFP and UNICEF are scaling up operations in select countries from the Sahel and the Horn of Africa regions, where an estimated 6.5 million suffer from wasting.

We will work together in more streamlined and integrated approaches to ensure that millions of vulnerable children in low-income and fragile settings receive the health and nutrition support they need for survival, growth, and development, while incorporating a strong, learning agenda to inform further expansion to additional countries and regions.

WFP and UNICEF call on all partners, including governments; other UN agencies; non-governmental organizations; the private sector; foundations; and international financial institutions, to mobilize the funding, support and capacities required to meet these urgent needs.



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Areas of focus	Specific interventions	Lead partner	Supporting partner
Global, regional and national technical leadership and coordination	1 Lead and coordination of global, regional and national efforts to prevent and treat wasting, in all contexts.	UNICEF	
	2 Support WHO's lead with the provision of normative guidance for the prevention and treatment of wasting.	UNICEF and WFP	
Situation analysis and nutrition information systems	3 Support national governments with the analysis of the nutrition and food security situation facing children and women, its determinants and drivers and the potential pathways for positive change.	UNICEF and WFP	
	4 Support national governments with data collection – including NutriDash – to forecast needs and track progress, as well as with evidence and information on best programming practices.	UNICEF and WFP	
Prevention of maternal and child wasting	5 Support national governments in expanding coverage and quality of primary health care and related services and practices for pregnant women, children under five and their mothers, with emphasis on the first 1,000 days, from conception to age two years.	UNICEF	
	6 Support the implementation of nutrition services for children and women to improve breastfeeding, complementary foods and feeding, ensure adequate weight gain, linear growth, and development in infancy and early childhood (with emphasis on the first 1,000 days), and to support maternal health, nutrition and wellbeing.	UNICEF	WFP
	7 Support the implementation of services to improve maternal nutrition during pregnancy and lactation, ensure adequate gestational weight gain, prevent low birth weight, and support adequate breastfeeding in infancy and early childhood.	UNICEF	WFP
	8 Support national governments in expanding coverage and quality of water, sanitation and hygiene services and practices to prevent diarrhea, enteropathy and infections in pregnant women, children and mothers.	UNICEF	
	9 Provide supplementary rations targeting young children where food and social protection systems cannot ensure access to enough food of adequate quality to prevent child wasting.	WFP	UNICEF
	10 Provide supplementary rations for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers (including malnourished PLW) where food and social protection systems cannot ensure the minimum nutrient intake to support healthy pregnancy and lactation outcomes.	WFP	UNICEF

Areas of focus	Specific interventions	Lead partner	Supporting partner
Prevention of maternal and child wasting <i>(cont.)</i>	11 Provide general food assistance to maintain vulnerable households' access to food where food and social protection systems cannot ensure a minimum diet due to food insecurity and/or fragility.	WFP	
	12 Support national governments with the procurement, storage, distribution, and management of specialized nutritious foods for the prevention of wasting as part of national systems.	WFP	UNICEF
	13 Support national governments to strengthen food value chains that increase the nutritional quality of children's and women's diets, particularly through improving the availability and affordability of safe, age-appropriate nutritious foods.	WFP	UNICEF
	14 Support national governments to develop policies and guidelines to improve children's diets and food environments, including through public sector policies on marketing, labelling, financial incentives and disincentives, and food environments where children live, learn, play and eat.	UNICEF	WFP
	15 Support national governments to develop and implement nutrition-sensitive social protection policies, strategies and programmes including conditional or unconditional cash transfers to provide children and women from vulnerable families with access to nutritious diets, health services and education to prevent wasting and break the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition.	UNICEF and WFP	
Early detection and treatment of child wasting	16 Support national governments with the delivery of services for the early detection and treatment of maternal and child wasting, through the 3 pillars of primary health care: facility-based services, outreach services, and community-based services.	UNICEF	WFP
	17 In fragile contexts, support Government, UNICEF and implementing partners with the delivery of services for the early detection and treatment of wasting where children and women in need cannot be reached as part of national systems.	WFP	
	18 Support national governments with the procurement, storage, distribution and management of RUTF (UNICEF), RUSF (WFP) and other essential commodities for the early detection and treatment of wasting as part of national systems.	UNICEF	WFP
	19 In fragile contexts, support Government, UNICEF and implementing partners with the delivery of RUTF, RUSF and other essential commodities in hard-to-reach areas where women and children in need cannot be reached as part of national systems.	WFP	
	20 Support national governments to integrate the early detection of child and maternal wasting into social protection programmes with timely referral to facility- and community- based treatment services.	UNICEF and WFP	

