Chapter 1 Introduction
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the MAMI Project

The management of acute malnutrition in infants under six months (MAMI) is currently hampered by poor evidence on which to base guidelines. Both facility-based1 and community-based programmes2–4 face challenges in their management. Such challenges have been highlighted in recent published concerns5,6, documented field experiences and debate6, a WHO technical review of the management of severe malnutrition7 and in the proceedings of the Infant Feeding in Emergencies (IFE) Core Group8.

As a result, infants under six months are admitted to programmes with variable capacity and skill to manage them. Efforts have been made to ‘stop-gap’ the lack of guidance9,10 and operational agencies have undertaken different interventions, sometimes guided by field research. Thus a body of experience in MAMI has accumulated. However, this remains disparate and often exists as raw data or internal agency documents. Once collated and formally analysed, however, these data are valuable and worthy of use as an initial basis for investigation.

The Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) was established in 1996 by international humanitarian agencies to accelerate learning and improve institutional memory in the emergency food and nutrition sector. Many of the challenges around MAMI have been highlighted to ENN in its flagship publication, Field Exchange, and through its involvement in the IFE Core Group. The MAMI Project was conceptualised by the ENN and implemented in collaboration with UCL Centre for International Child Health and Development (CIHD) and Action Contre la Faim (ACF). MAMI was funded by the UNICEF-led Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Nutrition Cluster.

Given the background and ENN’s mandate, the MAMI Project is located in the emergency nutrition sector and speaks especially to those concerned with humanitarian response.

1.2 Aim, objectives and long term vision

The MAMI Project focuses on infants aged less than six months (0 to 5.9 months old). From hereon, this age-group is referred to as ‘infant <6m’ (plural ‘infants <6m’). Older infants and young children aged six to 59 months are referred to as ‘children 6 to 59m’.

Aim: The aim of the MAMI Project is to investigate the management of acutely malnourished infants <6m in emergency programmes, in order to improve practice by contributing to evidence-based, better practice guidelines.

Objectives: Focused on acutely malnourished infants <6m, the objectives are:

- To establish the infant burden of disease.1
- To establish what is currently advised in the form of guidelines, policies and strategies
- To determine what is carried out in practice
- On the basis of this ‘field evidence’ and other relevant published literature, to make recommendations for future practice and research.

Vision: Long term, all malnourished infants should receive effective, evidence-based care. There are multiple competing health needs in vulnerable populations, therefore strategies to treat this group should also be cost effective and achieve maximal possible public health impact.

Outputs: Evidence presented in the MAMI report will be used to form the basis of:

- Summary report targeted at field staff, with an emphasis on content relevant to inform better practice
- Published research

1 This first objective was not in the original project objectives, but was added following initial consultations with stakeholders.
It is hoped that the MAMI Project will provide a starting place for the development of a stronger evidence base through further operational and formal research, leading to more formal best practice guidelines in future.

**Target audience:** This report should be of particular interest to:

a) Policy makers, programme managers and clinicians involved in MAMI in emergency contexts and nutritionally vulnerable settings.

b) Professionals in related disciplines with indirect involvement in MAMI, such as neonatal, reproductive health, psychosocial, speech and language, breastfeeding counsellors and community development specialists.

c) Researchers, students and others wishing to gain a rapid overview of current practices and key issues surrounding MAMI.

### 1.3 The process

The MAMI Project was implemented from January 2008 to July 2009. The process involved a MAMI ‘core’ team comprising the ENN, UCL CiHD and ACF, a research advisory group (RAG) and an interagency steering group (IASG) of UN agencies, NGOs and independent individuals with relevant experiences (see acknowledgements for members and contributors). Face to face meetings, e-mail and phone were used to establish and elaborate on the key questions to be addressed, and how to address them.

The MAMI Project has been an iterative process. Opportunities to explore further emerging key issues beyond the original remit of the project were taken, such as assessment of disease burden of infant malnutrition (Chapter 3), review of breastfeeding assessment tools (Chapter 7) and a review of antibiotic use in infants < 6m (summarised in Section 9.7).

The main outputs of the MAMI Project are this report, a summary report and publication of key findings (in process and planned). Key findings of the project have been shared at a number of key meetings and a variety of fora in the UK, Malawi and Bangkok. With completion of the MAMI Project, the MAMI ‘core’ team will continue to actively disseminate findings.

### 1.4 MAMI Project Framework

From the outset of the MAMI Project, it was considered essential to locate the MAMI Project within a framework for the management of malnutrition in this age-group. An initial draft framework, modelled on the UNICEF conceptual framework, informed early discussions with RAG and the IASG, was developed during the course of the project and finalised in light of project findings (see Appendix 1).

### Endnotes


