



# GLOBAL MALNUTRITION INITIATIVE



June 2023

**COUNTRY:**  
Kenya, Somaliland

**THEME:**  
Nutrition

**DONORS:**  
Innocent Foundation  
Save the Children Italy  
UK Aid Match

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Wasting, or acute malnutrition, affects 45 million children and up to 80% do not receive treatment.
- The Global Malnutrition Initiative is piloting and testing new ways to help more children access life-saving care, by bringing treatment closer to communities.
- Our research shows that community health worker (CHW) treatment of malnutrition is highly effective, with children recovering more quickly than those treated at the health facility.
- CHW treatment of malnutrition is not widely implemented but there is growing recognition of its potential. New WHO guidelines on wasting, due soon, could give further support to this approach.



## SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Child wasting, or acute malnutrition, is a deadly form of malnutrition when a child is too thin for their height. It adversely affects child growth, brain development and lifelong opportunities. Right now, over 45 million children are acutely malnourished with 13.6 million of these severely acutely malnourished and facing a heightened risk of death.

Treatment for acute malnutrition is effective, with an 80% - 90% recovery rate. However, too few children access treatment, or access it too late. It is estimated that more than three quarters of children with acute malnutrition do not get the treatment they need. This is largely due to lack of available services and supplies, and in places where services do exist, there are access constraints, including caregivers' lack of awareness of the symptoms of malnutrition, and the distance to the nearest health facility.



## OUR APPROACH

The Global Malnutrition Initiative (GMI) is Save the Children's innovative approach to treating and preventing child wasting within fragile and conflicted affected countries where children are most at risk. We're achieving this by empowering local communities to be able to prevent and manage malnutrition by increasing access to much-needed treatment closer to home.

Our programme, initiated with our own resources and now part funded by FCDO through UK Aid Match, is piloting the early detection and treatment of malnutrition by community health workers (CHWs). We have developed training and simplified tools, including a simplified colour-coded arm measuring band, to enable CHWs to diagnose and treat children effectively. In order to scale this approach, our project also involves an important research element, generating robust evidence to address knowledge gaps and inform policy change at the national and global levels.



## WHY WE THINK IT WORKS

CHW treatment of wasting could significantly boost the numbers of children who access life-saving support. CHWs are much more accessible to families than travelling to health centres, meaning more children will receive treatment sooner and are less likely to deteriorate and

need specialised care. This also takes pressure off health centres and hospitals so they can focus on the most vulnerable children.

CHWs already provide treatment for other common illnesses such as pneumonia, malaria and diarrhoea but are currently only able to screen and refer children with malnutrition to health facilities for treatment. Integrating malnutrition treatment into this model is much simpler for families, and means children receive more comprehensive care through the health system, as co-morbidity of malnutrition alongside other illnesses is common.



### OUR EVIDENCE

Working with the Kenyan government and our partners, we conducted a randomised cluster control trial (RCT) in northern Kenya to examine the efficacy of CHW treatment compared to facility-based care.

The results showed that CHW treatment is at least as safe and effective, or more, than care provided at the facility level. Children were more likely to complete their full treatment and recovered more quickly. Preliminary analysis suggested this approach may also be more cost effective.

Thanks to the success of this research, the Kenyan government is exploring policy change to enable CHWs to treat more children with malnutrition. The evidence was also fed into WHO's review of wasting guidelines, due to be published in summer 2023.



### NEXT STEPS

Using UK Aid Match Funding, we are now entering a second phase of this research to explore the cost and practicality of scaling up CHW treatment of malnutrition across Kenya.

We are also setting up a similar research programme in Somaliland, working closely with the Ministry of Health and Development, as well as University College London as our research partner. We have completed a successful feasibility study and the research is due to begin this summer.

We are also partnering with other NGOs to provide expertise and advice to UNICEF. This includes producing a training package on CHW and other simplified approaches to treating malnutrition, which will be available to health workers and communities around the world.



## WHAT COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS HAVE TO SAY

Two-year-old Aamina\* was treated for malnutrition by community health worker, Huda\* in Somaliland.

Huda started providing treatment for acute malnutrition as part of a research pilot Save the Children is running with its partners to help more malnourished children access treatment, sooner. Previously, she could only treat malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea.

Huda says that although her workload has increased, she is very happy.



**"I've seen a lot of change since I started this.**

**Before, I could only do assessments and refer children with malnutrition to the health facility – this was very far away and demoralising for the mother. Everyone is satisfied now".**