

NUTRITION FOR HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT (NHD) *Nutrition in emergencies*

Human hunger and malnutrition

Hunger and malnutrition are rampant among refugees and displaced populations, representing currently over 40 million people worldwide, many of whom – infants, children, adolescents, adults and elderly – suffer from one or more of the multiple forms of malnutrition. This is a continuing travesty of the fundamental human right to adequate food and nutrition, and freedom from hunger and malnutrition, particularly in a world that has both the resources and knowledge to end this catastrophe.

The tragic consequences of malnutrition include death, increased morbidity, disability, stunted mental and physical growth and, as a result, impaired national socioeconomic development. The level of risk of malnutrition in emergencies depends on factors such as the degree of civil security, food availability and accessibility, and adequacy of assistance delivery. Anaemia, vitamin A deficiency, and IDD are prevalent in emergency-affected populations. In addition, micronutrient deficiencies diseases such as scurvy, pellagra and beriberi frequently occur in populations entirely dependent on food aid.

What WHO/NHD does in context of crisis and conflict

The main thrust of WHO's nutrition work in the context of crisis and conflict is to:

- Provide effective technical support through the production and dissemination of scientifically validated and up-to-date guidelines, norms, criteria and methodologies on nutritional standards; food/ration composition; assessment of malnutrition including specific nutrient deficiencies; improved management of severe malnutrition; monitoring nutritional status; and nutritional surveillance for both prevention/early warning and response when emergencies arise.
- Strengthen, through information dissemination and training, national, subnational and international capacities to manage the nutritional needs of populations in emergencies.

NHD, in collaboration with HAC and the six regional nutrition advisors, works closely with UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, NGOs, academic institutions and other concerned groups and organizations.

NHD addresses some of the problems through:

□ Normative and standard-setting work

- A manual on how to **manage nutrition in major emergencies**, intended for health and nutrition professionals, covers estimation of energy, protein, and other nutrient requirements in a population; assessment and management of malnutrition and related health problems; general and selective feeding programmes; and human resources development.
- The preparation of a **simplified field guide** on determining nutrition requirements, assessing and monitoring nutritional status, and preventing and treating protein-energy malnutrition and micronutrient deficiency diseases in emergencies.
- Technical reviews on the prevention and control of **scurvy, pellagra, and thiamine deficiency** were prepared following a request from UNHCR; they are intended to help in the diagnosis, management and prevention of outbreaks of these deficiency disorders specifically in emergency-affected populations.
- The preparation of **guiding principles for feeding infants and young children in emergencies** providing basic guidance for feeding infants and young children in emergency-affected populations.

- **Training modules** for humanitarian aid workers **on infant feeding in emergencies** are being developed together with WHO/CAH, WHO/HAC, IBFAN, LINKAGES, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP.

- The development of **guiding principles for caring for the nutritionally vulnerable during emergencies** following a technical consultation that NHD organized jointly with UNHCR.
- Training modules for **improved management of severe malnutrition** have been finalized and training of senior health workers in various countries is being carried out.

□ **Technical support**

- Technical support is provided in the area of nutrition in emergencies to front-line UN partner organizations (UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF), other international humanitarian/relief agencies, and governments. This covers nutrition in emergency and disaster-affected populations, e.g. technical guidance on nutritional standards; food/ration composition; assessment of malnutrition/specific deficiencies; monitoring nutritional status; and nutritional surveillance for both prevention/early warning and response when emergencies arise. It also includes production of field manuals on:
 - Guidelines for estimating food and nutritional needs in emergency situations;
 - Operational guidance for emergency relief staff and policy-makers on infant feeding in emergencies;
 - Appropriate management of severe malnutrition.
- Collaboration with HAC, e.g. participation in briefings on current crises; assistance with the identification of appropriate nutrition consultants; provision of technical inputs in the area of nutrition.
- Technical support in nutrition, in collaboration with HAC and the regional nutrition advisors, through participation in emergency team visits (joint UN assessment/monitoring/programme formulation teams) to emergency-affected areas for nutritional aspects for prevention/rapid response as emergencies arise, e.g. Afghanistan crisis; Horn of Africa, southern Africa crisis; the Occupied Palestinian Territories; Iraq and Liberia.
- Optimal sustainable health and nutrition benefits of food-assisted development projects targeted to meeting the needs of the vulnerable food-insecure are promoted, particularly by ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of WFP food aid policies and programmes in both emergency and development contexts.

□ **Collaboration with UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and NGOs**

This is an important part of NHD's work in the field of nutrition in emergencies. Just a few examples include:

- participation in joint assessment missions;
- participation in technical workshops;
- production of joint guidelines;
- participation in the establishment of the ENN/ Emergency Nutrition Network and financial contribution to the production and distribution of its newsletter Field Exchange;
- participation in the workshops of the Interagency Group on Food and Nutrition in Emergencies.