



The Child Deaths from Acute Malnutrition: A Global Challenge to Health and Development



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Abbreviations: WHO: World Health Organization; WFP: World Food Programme; FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization; UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund; GAP: Global Action Plan

Letter to Editor

I am writing this letter to highlight the alarming situation of child wasting due to acute malnutrition. Every one of the third children is globally affected by malnutrition. In addition, it has affected different regions of the world thus leading to health issues, slow economic growth, and socio-economic issues. This catastrophic situation has been increasing at a rate of 0.6% due to a lack of access to medical facilities, resources, and food. According to the live hunger map of WFP on 18 Jan 2023, 0.62 billion people are suffering from insufficient food consumption [1]. Furthermore, it is the deadliest form of malnutrition, which mainly affects children under five. It has a great impact on children's physical growth (height, weight)

but is also known to cause various diseases such as anemia, Kwashiorkor, and marasmus. As per the report of UNICEF and World Health Organization (WHO; Geneva, New York) published on 12th Jan; 2023, 30 million children are acutely malnourished in the 15 worst affected countries. Of which, 8 million died [2].

According to the global hunger index of October 2022, a total of 35 countries are affected by acute malnutrition and Yemen is the most affected country in the world with an index of 45.1 followed by the Central African Republic with an index of 44 as shown in figure 1 below.

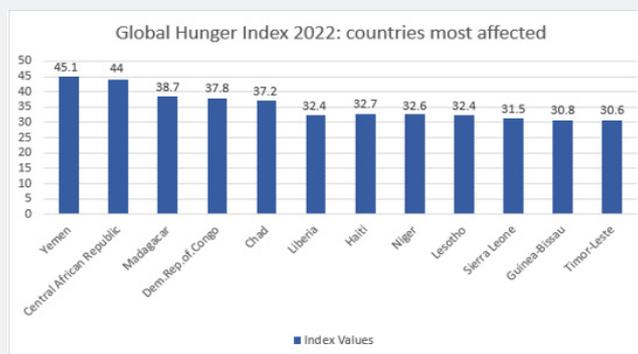


Figure 1: Statistical report of the most affected region by acute malnutrition.

Yemen has been on the affected list since 2000 due to a lack of access to primary healthcare services, conflicts, climate change, and the rising cost of living due to increased fuel prices and the recent pandemic of COVID-19. As per the situation report of Yemen on September 2022 by World Food Programme (WFP), 3.5 million people are acutely malnourished. Among these 2.2 million children are under the age of five [3]. Furthermore, malnutrition in Yemen has created a humanitarian crisis and famine with the outbreak of vaccine-preventable diseases such as cholera and diphtheria hence leading to preventable deaths. Therefore, timely action and preventive strategy should have been opted for to avoid huge losses in terms of an epidemic. In pursuance of the current catastrophic situation, the five UN agencies as Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Health Organization (WHO) have taken initial steps to combat acute malnutrition by developing Global Action Plan on Child wasting to deal with its adversity or vulnerability in worst affected countries such as Yemen, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, and Haiti, etc. Similarly, according to the report of November 2022, WFP is providing humanitarian aid, bilateral donation, and food assistance to 11 million people to ameliorate the current situation of malnutrition in Yemen [4]. According to Flippo Grandi at UNHCR on 12 Jan, steps are taken to improve

analysis and targeting so that highly affected individuals could be reached first [5]. Furthermore, Global Action Plan for Child Wasting (GAP) is currently working with UNICEF's plan of No time to Waste and WFP's surge plan to respond to the Global food and nutrition crisis and to address waste in food insecure contexts respectively.

Despite UN agencies, the governance of any country should show concern for this catastrophic situation and should ensure the availability of proper sanitation, food, medical facilities, and resources and raise public health awareness. Apart from conventional approaches, we can opt for scientific approaches such as genetic engineering and bio-fortification to improve our crops and boost agriculture. If the necessary action is not taken by the government authorities, the situation will worsen day by day.

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