

Fact Sheet: “STARVED FOR ATTENTION” **The Doctors Without Borders Nutrition Campaign**

What is the Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) nutrition campaign?

MSF advocates for specific and targeted strategies to ensure children under two in “malnutrition hotspots,” such as Africa’s Horn and Sahel regions and parts of Asia, have access to the minimum nutrition they require.

Why did MSF begin a nutrition campaign?

- Every year 9.7 million children die before their fifth birthday. Malnutrition contributes to between one third and one half of all these deaths.¹
- The World Health Organization estimates there are 178 million children that are malnourished across the globe, and at any given moment, 20 million suffering from the most severe form.
- MSF estimates that only 3% of the 20 million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition receive the treatment they need.
- Good nutrition is about food *quality*, not just quantity. Children become malnourished when they do not receive the essential nutrients their bodies require to resist infection and grow.
- Yet conventional food aid continues to provide children with inadequate foods, such as grains and fortified flours that do not contain all the nutrients that a young child needs. Sending adult food to feed young children will not save them from the risk of malnutrition.
- Children require diets that contain specific nutrients included in animal-source food, like those in milk. Without essential nutrients, young children are at risk for malnutrition that leads to increased vulnerability to disease and increased risk of death.

What are ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUFs)?

- Ready-to-use foods (RUFs) are nutrient-rich, energy-dense foods geared to the specific needs of young children. They are heat-stable and do not require cooking, added water, or refrigeration. The RUFs used by MSF deliver the full range of nutrients a child needs in a peanut and milk-based paste made with essential macro- and micronutrients, and sealed in premeasured packets that families can take home.
- RUFs allow the vast majority of seriously malnourished children to be treated at home by their mothers or other caregivers, instead of in a hospital! This method minimizes the risk for children of contracting an infection in hospital and also allows governments and aid organizations to treat more children than ever before, with a higher recovery rate.²

What is MSF’s experience with malnutrition in its medical projects?

- MSF’s experience in Niger in 2005, a year of exceptional food insecurity there, marked a turning point in its approach to malnutrition. Using RUFs, MSF treated over 60,000 severely malnourished children—more than it had ever treated before—with an over 90% recovery rate.³
- MSF has since moved towards the use of outpatient care for all cases of acute malnutrition, except for those with medical complications (malnutrition and measles, pneumonia, or when the child cannot eat).

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¹ UNICEF statistics: <http://www.childinfo.org/mortality.html>

² In 2006, MSF treated nearly 65,000 children in Maradi, Niger, reaching a recovery rate of 95.5% among the moderately malnourished and 81.3% among the severely malnourished.

³ Field Exchange. Emergency Nutrition Network. Scaling up treatment of acute childhood malnutrition in Niger, Issue 28, July 2006. www.enonline.net

- In Niger in 2007, MSF launched a pilot program using a modified RUF as a supplement to prevent some 62,000 children from becoming malnourished during the period of seasonal food shortages. The program has helped to stanch a rise in acute malnutrition in one of the country's high prevalence districts.
- MSF treated over 150,000 children in 2006 and 2007 in 22 countries with therapeutic and supplemental therapeutic food.

For more information visit www.doctorswithoutborders.org/malnutrition

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Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an international independent medical humanitarian organization that delivers emergency aid to people affected by armed conflict, epidemics, natural and man-made disasters, and exclusion from health care in more than 60 countries and was the recipient of the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize.

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