Addressing Malnutrition in Iraq through a Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition Programme

WFP and the Ministry of Health (MOH) have formed a partnership to address malnutrition in Iraq through targeted nutritional interventions for malnourished children and pregnant/lactating women in areas with high prevalence of malnutrition. This is in line with the National Nutrition Strategy for Iraq (2012-2014), which was prepared with support from WFP and approved by the Council of Ministers in April 2012. It includes as one of its objectives to reduce the prevalence of wasting and stunting among children under five years of age. Amongst other interventions, this is to be achieved by promoting and supporting appropriate infant and young child feeding practices at health facilities and community levels and ensuring appropriate maternal nutritional health services throughout the reproductive age. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between MOH and WFP in June 2011.

WFP, together with the Ministry of Health, implemented a pilot programme from 2009-10 to provide food assistance for up to 307,000 malnourished children under 5, pregnant and lactating women and tuberculosis patients in the 41 most vulnerable districts of Iraq. A monthly food ration of fortified wheat flour, vegetable oil and white beans was distributed. Following this pilot programme, the Ministry of Health and WFP decided to focus the programme more directly on the prevention and treatment of malnutrition using highly nutritious, specialised food products.

Why assist pregnant women & malnourished children in Iraq?

- Malnutrition remains at critical levels in many parts of Iraq;
- Malnutrition is clearly linked to poverty and food insecurity; one in every three children in households vulnerable to food insecurity is malnourished and children from the poorest families have the highest rates of acute malnutrition, especially in rural areas;
- Micronutrient deficiencies are widespread and iodine deficiency is known to be endemic in Iraq; only 23 percent of Iraqi households use iodized salt;
- Maternal mortality stood at 84 per hundred thousand and under-five mortality at 41 per thousand in 2006 in Iraq. Low birth weight is estimated at 15 percent and anaemia affects 37.9 percent of pregnant women (25.8 percent among breastfeeding mothers);
- In the most vulnerable districts, only 54 percent of Primary Health Centres (PHCs) perform growth monitoring and 61 percent provide pre/ante natal care.

WFP Support

In line with the aims of the Ministry of Health, WFP proposes to support Primary Healthcare Centres in selected districts of Iraq with high levels of malnutrition to set up an integrated maternal child health and nutrition (MCHN) programme to prevent and treat malnutrition. Along with the monthly distributions of nutritionally enhanced food, pregnant and lactating women benefit from monthly pre- and post-natal consultations, anaemia measurements and iron/folate supplementation. Young
children, with their caregivers, attend monthly counselling and benefit from health services such as growth monitoring, immunization and nutrition education.

The overall aim will be to demonstrate a programme that could be taken over by the Ministry of Health and up-scaled in the future.

Based on the high levels of malnutrition in certain districts of Iraq, this programme aims:

1) To prevent stunting in children under two years in areas of highest chronic malnutrition through supplementary feeding.
2) To treat moderate acute malnutrition in children under 5 years in areas with the highest levels of wasting.
3) To prevent wasting (low weight-for-height) in children under two years in areas of high Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) during the agricultural lean season (January through April).
4) Improve maternal nutrition and thus prevent malnutrition in children by supplementary feeding for pregnant/lactating women in areas with high prevalence of malnutrition, thus breaking the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition.

Project Design

The Maternal Child Health and Nutrition programme will have the following activities:

1. For the prevention of wasting (weight-for-height), blanket distributions of a monthly individual take home ration of high-energy-biscuits (183 g/pp/day + 5g/p/day of iodized salt), providing 825 kcal/day 4kg HEB + 150g of iodized salt for children from 6-23 months in areas of high Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) during the lean season (Jan-April).

2. For the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition, targeted distributions of a monthly take-home-ration of 92 g/pp/day of Supplementary Plumpy, a Ready to Use Supplementary Food (RUSF), (imported) to malnourished children 6-59 months of age identified as malnourished (WFH< -2 SD and >-3 z score). This will be targeted to the districts with the highest levels of wasting.

3. For the prevention of stunting (height-for-age), blanket distributions of a monthly individual take home ration PlumpyDoz (47 g/pp/day), a Ready-to-Use Supplementary Food (RUSF) (imported) to children under 2 years. This will be targeted to the districts with the highest levels of stunting.

4. For improved maternal nutrition, blanket supplementary feeding of pregnant/lactating women through the health system by providing a monthly take-home ration of high-energy-biscuits (217 gram/pp/day) and iodized salt (5 g/pp/day), providing 975kcal/day. Areas with high prevalence of malnutrition (stunting > 50%) will be targeted.

Targeting, geographical coverage

These activities will be targeted to the following eight districts of Iraq based on the highest rates of stunting and wasting from the WFP/GOI 2008 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis:
Improved birth outcomes | Prevention of wasting | Treatment of MAM | Prevention of stunting
--- | --- | --- | ---

**Salah Al Din**
- **District**: BALAD
- PLW: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 11,324
- Malnourished children 6-59 months: 14,872
- All children 6-23 months: 0

**Diala**
- **District**: AL MIKDADIA
- PLW: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 12,603
- Malnourished children 6-59 months: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 0

**Erbil/Ninewa**
- **District**: Makmoom
- PLW: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 2,346
- Malnourished children 6-59 months: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 0

**Thi – Qar**
- **District**: AL SHATRA
- PLW: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 18,570
- Malnourished children 6-59 months: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 0

**Dahuk**
- **District**: Aqraa
- PLW: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 3,036
- Malnourished children 6-59 months: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 0

**Qadissia**
- **District**: AIFAK
- PLW: 7,706
- All children 6-23 months: 0
- Malnourished children 6-59 months: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 838

**Diala**
- **District**: KHANAKEEN
- PLW: 9,682
- All children 6-23 months: 0
- Malnourished children 6-59 months: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 22,355

**Anbar**
- **District**: AL KAIME
- PLW: 7,433
- All children 6-23 months: 0
- Malnourished children 6-59 months: 0
- All children 6-23 months: 6,975

**Sub-total**
- **Total**: 24,822
- **Wasting level**: 47,879
- **Treatment of MAM**: 14,872
- **Prevention of stunting**: 30,167

**TOTAL**
- **Total**: 117,740

The total cost of this programme for a period of 12 months is approximately $11.2 million.

**Initial Pilot Programme in Iraq**

WFP has received some funding, which has been programmed for the initial phase of the programme. While simultaneously seeking further resources, the initial funds will be targeting two out of the four components under the mother and child health and nutrition programme at a smaller scale for a period of six months.

**Project Design**

The Maternal Child Health and Nutrition programme will have the following activities:

1. For the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition, targeted distributions of a monthly take-home ration of 92 g/pp/day of Supplementary Plumpy, a Ready to Use Supplementary Food (RUSF), (imported) to malnourished children 6-59 months of age identified as malnourished (WFH< -2 SD and >-3 z score). This will be targeted to the districts with the highest levels of wasting.

2. For the prevention of stunting (height-for-age), blanket distributions of a monthly individual take home ration PlumpyDoz (47 g/pp/day), a Ready-to-Use Supplementary Food (RUSF) (imported) to children under 2 years. This will be targeted to the districts with the highest levels of stunting.

**Targeting, geographical coverage**

These activities will be targeted to the following six districts of Iraq based on the highest rates of stunting and wasting from the WFP/GOI 2008 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis:

**Treatment of Wasting (Moderate acute malnutrition)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governorate</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Wasting level</th>
<th>Target beneficiaries (6-59 months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salah Al Din</td>
<td>BALAD</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>5,564</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diala AL MIKDADIA 29.7 5,000
Erbil/Ninewa Makgmoor 25.8 4,036
**Total** 14,600

*Ration: Individual monthly take home ration of 92g/pp/day Supplementary Plumpy*

**Prevention of Stunting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governorate</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Stunting level</th>
<th>Target beneficiaries (6-23 months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qadissia</td>
<td>AIFAK</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>2,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diala</td>
<td>KHANAKEEN</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>3,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahuk</td>
<td>Imadiyah</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>6,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ration: Individual monthly take home ration of 47g/pp/day Plumpy Doz*

The total cost of this programme for a period of 6 months is approximately $ 1.1 million.