

PRESS RELEASE

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UNICEF FUNDS MEDICAL UNIVERSITY TRAINING FOR TREATMENT OF SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia – UNICEF has funded the training of trainers (TOT) for more than 100 health professionals at three Ethiopian medical schools so that they can train their peers in the treatment and management of severely malnourished children.

Since the beginning of this year, 41 nurses, 12 doctors and 54 medical interns have been provided training based on the national protocol at Addis Ababa, Gondar and Jimma Universities. Therapeutic feeding units (TFUs), which have been set up at the hospitals with UNICEF support including therapeutic feeding products and basic equipment, were used to give the participants practical hands-on experience dealing with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) cases.

“UNICEF has welcomed this university initiative that will enable these newly trained medical professionals to treat severely malnourished children with the latest scientific knowledge,” said Sylvie Chamois, Nutrition Officer at UNICEF. “We hope to expand the training to other universities so that eventually SAM treatment will be part of all medical school curricula.”

The Oromyia Health Bureau plans to open TFUs in Nekempte, Metu and Dembidolo Hospitals and has sent 60 of its health workers to be trained on the management of SAM at Jimma University. Training will also be conducted at Gondar University for members of the Amhara Health Bureau, which has opened a TFU at the Dabat Health Centre with plans to open two more in South Gondar. A TFU at Yekatit 12 Hospital is in the process of being opened by the Addis Ababa Health Bureau.

Ethiopia has an estimated 70 million inhabitants of which 52 per cent suffer from chronic malnutrition. Somali, Afar, Amhara, Oromiya and Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) regions were particularly hard hit by the recent drought. Last year, Ethiopia had a 15 per cent Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate and a 3 per cent SAM rate in drought-affected areas.

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"Malnutrition in the country has been exacerbated by the poor rains, which led to crop failure and livestock deaths," said UNICEF Representative Bjorn Ljungqvist. "Malnutrition also increased the population's susceptibility to disease, including malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, which again have their repercussions on the nutritional status and the development of children."

During the crisis in 2002/2003, UNICEF consultants Dr. Yvonne Grellety and Professor Mike Golden worked with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health (MoH), universities, NGOs and UN agencies to develop a national protocol in the treatment of severe acute malnutrition. The Ethiopian protocol was endorsed by the Government on 20 June 2003 in Nazareth. The protocol proved to be extremely effective in reducing the case fatality rate of children treated for severe malnutrition to less than 5 per cent. In SNNPR, where 27 of the 44 Therapeutic Feeding Centres (TFCs) were located, the mortality rate was 4 per cent.

This year, a total of 201 health professionals from health clinics, NGOs and medical schools have received TFC management training with assistance from UNICEF. In 2003, 881 health care workers around the country were trained in TFC management.

UNICEF plans to assist the MoH in the future training of more regional health workers with the goal of integrating the protocol into routine health care treatment and establishing additional TFUs. Staff in health facilities will be trained to treat children with severe malnutrition, which will strengthen growth monitoring and screening skills. This training will ensure the continued build up of more TOTs as well as rapid response teams to deal with times of crisis.