

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

PROGRAM EVALUATION OF INTEGRATED DELIVERY OF HEALTH AND NUTRITION SERVICES IN NORTHERN MALI

Evaluation Assessment

This evaluation demonstrates that positive nutrition outcomes are achievable in complex humanitarian settings when interventions are well designed, implemented with fidelity, and culturally appropriate. The emergency nutrition program in northern Mali achieved a **97.3% recovery rate** that exceeded international Sphere standards and previously documented regional performance, while also strengthening healthcare systems and building community trust. The integrated approach combining therapeutic feeding, food assistance, and community engagement provides a scalable model for improving nutrition outcomes across sub-Saharan Africa, where recovery rates typically range from 53% to 82%.

Priority Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, the following seven actions are recommended for further implementation and scaling:

1. **Scale the integrated service delivery model** combining therapeutic feeding, food assistance, counseling, and hygiene promotion as the standard approach for nutrition programming in fragile settings.
2. **Invest in male engagement strategies** to address husband resistance to healthcare seeking, which emerged as a significant but manageable barrier.
3. **Digitize facility records through robust systems** to replace vulnerable hard copy registers and enable real-time monitoring and planning.
4. **Strengthen community health worker accessibility** by providing contact information for them and formalizing peer referral networks.
5. **Leverage increased healthcare trust** as part of the program to expand integrated services beyond nutrition to include immunization, maternal health, and family planning.
6. **Implement facility mentorship programs** using high-performing sites to share best practices and support underperforming facilities.
7. **Develop/promote locally produced nutrition supplements** with digital supply chain tracking to address stockouts and improve sustainability.

Unexpected Findings

Several findings emerged that contradict common assumptions about humanitarian nutrition programming:

Universal Staff Satisfaction: Despite operating in a conflict-affected region with resource constraints, **zero negative feedback** was recorded about healthcare staff across all 36 caregiver interviews, suggesting that quality service delivery is achievable even in challenging contexts.

Exceptional Adherence without Incentives: The program achieved **97% nutrition visit follow-up adherence** without direct incentives. Qualitative data suggests this was driven primarily by visible health improvements among participants and positive provider relationships.

Rapid Recovery Times: Treatment duration (28 days median) was significantly shorter than other Mali programs (40+ days) and regional studies, suggesting that the integrated approach may accelerate recovery.

Healthcare System Access and Use: 80% of participants reported positive influence on future healthcare-seeking behavior, indicating that nutrition programs can serve as effective entry points for broader health system strengthening.

Data Quality Achievement: Despite hard copy registers and challenging conditions, the program achieved **99% accuracy** in outcome classification, demonstrating that high-quality data collection is possible in humanitarian settings.

Program Overview

Lutheran World Relief (LWR), in partnership with Association pour le Développement du Nord du Mali (ADENORD) and the USAID-funded MOMENTUM Integrated Health Resilience project, implemented a 12-month emergency nutrition program in Mali's Gao and Tombouctou regions with funding from the Gates Foundation. The program addressed severe malnutrition exacerbated by conflict that displaced 330,000 people. Between March to July 2024, the program treated over 2,000 children aged 6 to 59 months across 11 health facilities, providing vitamin-enriched flour (Vitalbé), graduation food vouchers, and comprehensive nutrition support.

Key Outcomes

Treatment Results:

- **97.3% recovery rate** vs. 75% Sphere standard
- **1% dropout rate** vs. 15% Sphere threshold
- **Zero mortality** vs. 3-10% Sphere standards
- **1.06 kg mean weight gain** and **7.9 cm MUAC increase**

Program Quality:

- **99% data coverage** across facilities
- **100% coverage** of enriched flour distribution
- **Average of 3.6 visits** per child with 99% completion rate

Healthcare Use:

- **97% appointment adherence**
- **Universal satisfaction** with therapeutic foods and services
- **Continued healthcare utilization** post-program by all key informant interview participants

Program Context

The intervention addressed a humanitarian crisis in Gao and Timbuktu Regions, Mali where 3.6% of children had severe acute malnutrition and 15.7% had moderate acute malnutrition. The program's success occurred despite significant challenges including conflict, displacement, flooding, extreme heat, and supply chain disruptions.

Limitations

The evaluation lacked a control group and relied primarily on facility registers, limiting causal attribution. The 4-month evaluation period may not capture seasonal variations, and qualitative findings may reflect social desirability bias. Two facilities were excluded due to register destruction from flooding and poor storage.

Conclusion

This evaluation provides evidence that well-designed, culturally appropriate nutrition interventions can achieve positive nutrition outcomes while strengthening health systems in complex humanitarian contexts. The integrated approach and strong partnerships offer a replicable model for scaling across sub-Saharan Africa, with potential applications extending beyond nutrition to broader health system strengthening.

The evaluation was funded by the Gates Foundation, and the findings and conclusions contained in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Gates Foundation.



IMA WORLD HEALTH
LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF
CGA TECHNOLOGIES
GROUND UP INVESTING
FARMERS MARKET BRANDS