

CMAM 2021

22-25 March

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

SCALE PAPER

SIMPLIFIED NUTRITION PROTOCOLS

Preparing for scale

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An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Simplified nutrition protocols: summary of key points for going to scale

WHAT ARE THE SIMPLIFIED NUTRITION PROTOCOLS?

The simplified nutrition protocols include a range of adaptations intended to simplify processes and increase coverage.

CURRENT SCALE

More evidence and validation is required prior to bringing these approaches to scale.

Needs more reflection on ideal contexts for these modifications as they are not necessary for every programme.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCALE UP

Global validation and the changing of normative guidance is required.

A better understanding of supply chain implications is required prior to going to scale.

Implications for caseload need to be considered, including their impact on health worker workload.

A better understanding of financial implications, linked to changes in caseloads, is required.

CRITICAL NEXT STEPS

Harmonize terminology and definitions.

Secure long term funding for operational studies.

Conduct a meta-analysis to explore data and results to date across different settings and key factors that may influence effectiveness and cost.

Promote systematic and frequent screening mechanisms.

Identify opportunities to promote the simplified nutrition protocols.

Explore options for improving access to affordable RUTF.

Support financial modeling to understand the costs and potential cost-efficiencies linked to increased caseload/ coverage resulting from the simplified nutrition protocols.

This document is a summary of group work conducted during the CMAM 2021 conference in March 2021. The conference did not provide adequate time for lengthy discussions of these important topics, and therefore this document represents a starting point to refine discussions on bringing key adaptations and approaches to wasting management to scale. Concern is immensely grateful to all practitioners who took the time and interest to contribute to this document which will serve as a reference for the global Simplified Approaches Working Group.

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Nutrition worker, Santosh Kumar, checks a patient for malnutrition at a health facility, Union Council Samaro Road, Taluka, Umerkot, Pakistan
Photo: Khaula Jamil/Concern Worldwide

Brief Description

The simplified nutrition protocols are a grouping of modifications that aim to simplify the process of admitting and managing wasted children. These modifications intend to improve coverage and reduce the costs of caring for children with uncomplicated wasting while maintaining quality. Additionally, simplifying the process can help with the integration of the management of wasting into the health system. While modifications can be grouped in different ways, the main protocol modifications being discussed are:

Simplified Nutrition Protocols	Definition
MUAC and/or nutritional oedema only admissions	Use of MUAC and/or nutritional oedema as the only criteria of admissions and discharge
Expanded MUAC < 125 mm	Increasing the MUAC cut-off to admit all children <125 mm, this ensures children across the spectrum of wasting who are considered higher risk are eligible for treatment
Modified/optimized dosage	Normally the modified/optimized dosage of RUTF is used in combination with a single treatment product, but not necessarily, dosage of treatment product is most commonly reduced to: 2 sachets/day for severe wasting and 1 sachet/day for moderate wasting as determined by MUAC or oedema status
Use of one product for nutritional management (RUTF)	Treatment of wasted children, without complications, with one product – RUTF – across the entire spectrum of wasting

Evidence

The evidence for the above protocol modifications is varied and still evolving. These simplified nutrition protocols deviate from existing normative guidance and there is no consensus on when and how to implement these simplifications. Specially questions remain on which dosage to implement, how to manage children excluded by a MUAC/oedema only admissions criteria and in what contexts to shift to an increased MUAC cut-off. . For a review of current evidence on the simplified nutrition protocols see the publications and websites:

- › Action Against Hunger (2020). State of the Evidence 2020: Modifications Aiming to Optimize Acute Malnutrition Management in Children Under Five.
- › UNICEF (2020). Treatment of wasting using simplified approaches: A rapid evidence review.
- › Community of Practice for Simplified Approaches to Treatment Across the Continuum of Acute Malnutrition, <https://acutemalnutrition.org/en/Simplified-Approaches>
- › Emergency Nutrition Network (2020). Simplified Approaches to the Treatment of Wasting: Technical Brief.

Practical considerations for scaling up Simplified Nutrition Protocols¹

Succinctly summarizing the practical implications for all the protocol adaptations is difficult to do as they can vary between adaptations. As with all of the adaptations and approaches to the management of wasting discussed at the conference, scaling up simplified nutrition protocols will require contextualization to specific countries and contexts. The following list of practical considerations is, therefore, overarching but not exhaustive.

- › **Policies.** As stated above, these simplified nutritional protocols do not coincide with global normative guidance which constrains their implementation at scale. To reach scale, many governments will require WHO endorsement, and then key stakeholders can support governments to adapt national protocols to bring them in line. In the event that WHO does not incorporate the simplified protocols into its normative guidance, stakeholders will have to consider alternative routes for promoting them.
- › **Supply chain.** Effects on the supply chain are a major consideration with the simplified nutrition protocols. While expanded admission criteria will increase caseloads and could

put a pressure on product supply, a modified or optimized dosage for children with MUAC < 115mm can achieve recovery using less RUTF. Streamlining the supply chain with the use of one product may harmonize processes at a country level but could put strain on international supply with an increase in global demand. The global Simplified Approaches Working Group is working on caseload calculators to improve understanding of how these modifications affect supply chain demand

- › **Workforce.** The simplified nutrition protocols are generally appreciated by the health workforce as they simplify processes and eliminate the need for referrals between programs. One study reported that health workers felt combined treatment was easier to understand. However in terms of workload they mostly increase caseload which can put a strain on resources and stress health workers.
- › **Finance.** While in general a single product approach with reduced dosage costs less per child recovered than traditional RUTF treatment protocols, however total costs vary and are influenced by dosing regimen, type of products, higher caseload of moderately wasted children, and the use of one supply chain.

¹ All information in the Practical Considerations section of this paper are derived from the Action Against Hunger (2020) document; and the outcomes of the presentations, Q&A's; and working groups discussions in the CMAM 2021 conference.

Critical next steps

While there is still a lack of global consensus on the simplified nutrition protocols, the following critical next steps can help clarify the adaptations and provide additional evidence on their impact. It is important to mention that the Global Simplified Approaches Working group is already working to address some of these critical steps, especially the harmonization of terminology and definitions:

- › **Harmonize terminology and definitions** in order to improve communication on the simplified approaches, both at national and global level. This can be achieved by convening an expert panel.
- › **Secure long term funding for operational studies** that provide rigorous data on the caseload, supply, and financial implications of the simplified nutrition protocols.
- › **Conduct a meta-analysis** exploring the data from different trials and protocols to better understand impact and recovery with modified dosages for all children and focusing on vulnerable sub-sets (MUAC<115).
- › **Emphasise and promote systematic and frequent screening mechanisms** in order to ensure early identification and referral.
- › **Identify opportunities to promote the simplified approaches**, particularly in emergency contexts, despite the lack of congruence with global normative guidance.
- › **Explore options for improving access to affordable RUTF** or an alternative by supporting: (1) sustainable and cost-efficient local production for RUTF; (2) greater competition for global production of RUTF; and/or (3) identifying alternative products.

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For conference-related queries, contact cmam21@concern.net

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