**Nigeria: One out of every four children in Shinkafi and Zurmi is malnourished**

**MSF is urging immediate action after screening results reveal a catastrophic malnutrition crisis across Northwest Nigeria**

One out of every four children under the age of five is malnourished in the Shinkafi and Zurmi areas of Nigeria’s Zamfara state, according to a mass screening conducted in June by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and the Ministry of Health. Of the 97,149 children screened in 21 different urban and rural locations, 27 percent were found to be suffering from acute malnutrition, with five percent having severe acute malnutrition.

These concerning figures far exceed the 'critical level' threshold established by the World Health Organization regarding malnutrition prevalence. MSF urges health authorities, international organisations, and donors to immediately intensify their efforts to tackle the escalating malnutrition crisis in Zamfara state, as well as whole of Northwest Nigeria – a region not yet included in the United Nations Humanitarian Response Plan.

The mass screening held in June in the Shinkafi and Zurmi areas further revealed that about 22 per cent of children screened are moderately malnourished. Currently, the nutritional supplies essential to treat such children, also known as ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), are unavailable, as UNICEF halted its supplies at the start of the year. This current lack of humanitarian response to treat those who are moderately malnourished in Northwest Nigeria risks the lives of these children who, without immediate care, will progress to severe acute malnutrition that threatens their survival and compromises their long-term health.

“The screening results from Shinkafi and Zurmi are nothing short of alarming, revealing a catastrophic malnutrition crisis across Northwest Nigeria,” declares Abdullahi Mohammad, an MSF representative in Nigeria. “The response to this overwhelming disaster is grossly insufficient. With malnutrition rates soaring beyond critical levels and no immediate treatment available for moderate acute malnutrition apart from at MSF facilities, we’re effectively letting more children fall into life-threatening conditions. It is crucial we ensure every child receives the medical care they desperately need.”

MSF currently runs four inpatient and 17 outpatient facilities in Shinkafi, Zurmi, Gummi and Talata Mafara in Zamfara – a state badly affected by malnutrition. Across all four inpatient facilities, MSF teams have treated over 7,000 children from January to July 2024. These figures for admissions are 34 per cent higher than for the same period in 2023. In Shinkafi and Zurmi, where MSF conducted the recent malnutrition screening, the increase in admissions is 50 per cent more than the same period last year. At the medical facility in Gummi, admissions in July 2024 were almost double compared to the same month last year.

Alongside the significant increase in malnutrition admissions, MSF teams are seeing high numbers of children with vaccine preventable diseases such as measles. In Zamfara, they have treated at least 5,700 measles cases so far this year. Infectious diseases like measles, malaria, and acute watery diarrhoea, severely compromise the nutritional status of children. In turn, malnutrition makes them far more susceptible to these illnesses, with a higher risk of death.

“When I first brought my son into the hospital, I didn’t know if he would survive,” says Hafsat Lawal, a mother whose child is being treated for malnutrition at an MSF facility in Zamfara. “Back at home because of the insecurity we don’t have food. The prices of food have more than doubled. If we had money, we would have bought some grains, but we cannot.”

Communities are facing high levels of violence in Zamfara and have told MSF teams that they are scared to move around the state, taking huge risks to reach functioning healthcare facilities. It is estimated by the health authorities that as of 2023, only about 200 out of 700 healthcare centres in Zamfara are accessible, and the rest are non-functional. One of the reasons being that healthcare workers struggle to reach them.

Despite the ongoing humanitarian crisis and facing high levels of insecurity, communities in the Northwest have long been excluded from coordinated humanitarian response. It is essential that health authorities in this area, alongside international organisations and donors, urgently scale up their response. Immediate expansion of health facilities is needed to treat malnourished children to ensure that more hospitals can offer the type of inpatient care desperately needed to save lives. Moreover, UNICEF, as the primary supplier of RUTF, must ensure the consistent and sufficient delivery of these essential therapeutic foods to prevent more children from falling victim to this crisis.

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