

NO DATA, NO RESPONSE

THREATENING THE LIVES OF MILLIONS OF CHILDREN

Nutritional Epidemiology at risk

We need to build strong nutrition data systems: investing in sustainable, independent, and accessible information to protect the most vulnerable



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INTRODUCTION

The nutrition crisis is worsening, and the humanitarian community is increasingly losing its ability to anticipate it. As funding cuts erode critical data systems, we face the dangerous convergence of two realities: growing needs and a weakening capacity to detect, plan, predict and therefore respond effectively. The result could be invisible emergencies and inadequate responses. Undoubtedly, the greatest consequence will be millions of children who may be forgotten and left without treatment. This document is aimed at those involved in the fight against hunger, especially those of us who are represented in decision-making processes. The aim of the document is to raise awareness among all those involved in the fight against hunger of the need to continue to rely on quality data and information for decision-making.

Action Against Hunger is raising the alarm about this escalating situation and calling for joint solutions to the challenges we face. Strengthening the management and availability of nutrition data is essential to ensure that responses are timely, targeted, and effective. Without reliable information, there is a growing risk that the most urgent needs will go unseen—and unmet—resulting in lost opportunities to prevent and address hunger and malnutrition. This challenge is not solely the result of limited resources. It also reflects the need for stronger coordination among actors and sustained support for essential mechanisms such as the nutrition cluster, which in some contexts faces the risk of being scaled down or deactivated. Protecting and reinforcing these collective systems is crucial to ensuring that data continues to guide an effective and coherent response.

In certain contexts, limited acknowledgment of the severity of the crisis—sometimes shaped by political, economic, or diplomatic considerations—has posed additional challenges to coordinated response efforts. This reluctance often begins with obstruction or non-participation in data collection, which in turn hampers the rapid mobilization of humanitarian aid, delays technical assessments, and compromises the implementation of coordinated responses. When the data—and by extension, the crisis—are not acknowledged, affected populations are deprived of vital support. This also undermines international efforts to prevent famine or severe and moderate food insecurity, as emphasized in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2417.

Criticism of the current model highlights the need to foster collective processes grounded in broad dialogue between information users and providers at all levels, to support humanitarian decision-making based on evidence. We are also missing out on opportunities offered by not-so-new technologies that could help create a more connected information ecosystem. Prediction systems likely already have the capacity to generally identify high-risk areas using secondary and retrospective data. But if we are to be selective and efficiency-driven, it is essential to develop ways of working that enable responses based on needs self-identified by communities.

We must not overlook the value of primary data—originating from the families and individuals experiencing malnutrition—and the still-fragile systems responsible for generating and validating that information.



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THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF DATA IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

Nutrition data is not a technical luxury; it is the backbone of any life-saving humanitarian response.

It is this data that enables us to accurately identify who, where, when, and why malnutrition levels are rising, transforming general perceptions into concrete evidence that guides action. Methods such as SMART+¹ surveys provide rigorous estimates of the prevalence of wasting and other critical indicators, while Semi-Quantitative evaluation of access and coverage (SQUEAC)² assessments explore the coverage and bottlenecks of nutrition treatment programs. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)³ and Cadre Harmonisé (CH)⁴ analyses offer a consensus-based view of the severity and extent of food crises, integrating multiple data sources to inform strategic decisions. Data provided by qualitative methods and the opinion of the expert panel are also extremely important to understand why. The opinion of the people on the ground is essential.

Complementing these, routine nutrition surveillance is essential for rapidly detecting deterioration and triggering early response mechanisms. Without these systems—which serve as both radar and compass—Governments and humanitarian actors would be operating blindly, risking the allocation of resources where impact is minimal, or arriving too late to assist the populations most at risk.

In short, quality nutrition data not only enhances the efficiency and targeting of interventions but is also a fundamental requirement for fulfilling the humanitarian mandate to protect the lives and dignity of affected populations.

¹ Today, SMART is recognized as the standard methodology by national Ministries of Health, donors, and implementing partners of the Global Nutrition Cluster such as international NGOs and UN agencies that wish to undertake nutrition and mortality surveys. [SMART+ - SMART Methodology](#)

² Semi-QUantitative Evaluation of Access and Coverage. [SQUEAC | CMN](#)

³ The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification . [IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#)

⁴ Le Cadre Harmonisé est un outil fédérateur qui permet de faire une analyse pertinente consensuelle, rigoureuse et transparente de la situation alimentaire et nutritionnelle courante et projetée Cadre Harmonisé. [cadre harmonise](#)

WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING?

Without aiming to be exhaustive, this section highlights three countries where the impact of reduced resources for generating accurate, updated and reliable data serving for decision making processes is already clearly visible. In West and Central Africa, monitoring infrastructure is collapsing. Significant cuts in U.S. funding—particularly from the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)—have triggered a cascade of consequences. SMART surveys are being suspended in key locations, while (CH) exercises are increasingly fragmented or postponed. This situation has also slowed down the development and maintenance of health information systems based on the DHSI2⁵ and the cluster information system MICS⁶.

The latest regional CH analysis highlights a worrying deterioration in food and nutrition security in West and Central Africa⁷. However, key countries such as Mali and Niger are notably absent from this update. In Mali, no SMART exercise was planned for the first half of this year and only CH data from 2024 was used to estimate the projections of the hunger gap in the lean season of 2025. for the hunger. This information gap is primarily due to funding shortfalls that have prevented the completion of a national analysis. In Niger, this is due to the lack of agreement among all stakeholders to update existing data. As a result, outdated projections from the previous 2024 cycle are still being used to reflect the current situation, despite the tendency from previous years showing that updated data—collected closer to the lean season (*soudure*) repeatedly showing worsening conditions. Continued reliance on outdated figures risks significantly underestimating the scale and urgency of today's needs. Finally, in the case of Sudan, the withdrawal of the government from the IPC Acute Malnutrition (IPC AMN) mechanism has resulted in the lack of official food security updates. This is especially alarming given the presence of multiple famine hotspots in the country that demand urgent and coordinated monitoring and response.

All this is happening at a time when nutritional needs are rising dramatically. In 2024, food insecurity and child malnutrition continued to worsen for the sixth consecutive year, hitting hardest communities already exposed to recurrent crises and extremely fragile livelihoods. Interconnected factors such as protracted conflict, economic deterioration, extreme climatic shocks, and forced displacement continue to undermine food security and nutrition, deepening gaps in access to food and essential services. This deterioration is reflected in the fact that more than 295 million people in 53 countries and territories faced acute hunger in 2024, an increase of 13.7 million from the previous year⁸. In order to be aware of this problem, it should be added that RUTF⁹ (Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food) stock breaks down repeatedly and that the programs only have a coverage rate of around 50% at best. This means that not all children who need treatment receive it. To complete the picture, it is worth mentioning that the areas affected by conflict and displacement are also those with the least data available.

In 2025, funding for nutritional epidemiology dropped sharply across several priority countries. In Sudan, the Nutrition Cluster received only 59.7% of its 2024 funding needs—a USD 350.1 million requirement—crippling the ability to maintain SMART surveys and related assessments¹⁰. At the same time, already weak national surveillance systems are increasingly underfunded and struggling to function, further hampering access to timely and reliable data. Meanwhile, in Mali, Niger, and Chad, World Food Programme's (WFP) emergency support and nutrition operations were slashed by over 80%, prompting suspension or scale-down of essential interventions across the region^{11,12}.

⁵ [Home - DHIS2](#)

⁶ [Home | UNICEF MICS](#)

⁷ [Harmonized Framework | IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#)

⁸ [Global Report on Food Crises \(GRFC\) 2025](#)

⁹ RUTF is the most effective treatment for the management of severe uncomplicated acute malnutrition when used with proper management and medical protocols. Therefore, Action Against Hunger promotes the use of RUTF, preferably locally produced and meeting WHO specifications to treat children with uncomplicated severe acute malnutrition without medical complications who need it today, while promoting research projects that fill current knowledge gaps.

¹⁰ [Sudan | Global Nutrition Cluster](#)

¹¹ [Hunger Hotspots. FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity: June to October 2025 outlook](#)

¹² [Millions in Central Sahel and Nigeria at risk of food cuts as the World Food Programme faces severe funding crisis | World Food Programme](#)

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE LOSE THE ABILITY TO DETECT NEEDS IN TIME?

The inability to collect and analyze robust nutrition data has immediate and measurable consequences for the humanitarian response. Emergencies go unnoticed when we lose visibility. Without up-to-date prevalence data, programs struggle to justify their interventions. In some countries, key indicators—such as Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM), Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM), and Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR)—have not been measured for years, leaving decision-makers without the evidence needed to act effectively.

Many early warning systems remain reactive, often triggered only by rising mortality rates, meaning that nutritional crises are frequently identified only after they reach critical levels. This delay limits the possibility of implementing timely and effective responses. The lack of early detection of nutritional deterioration leads to an increase in unmet needs and reduces the potential impact of interventions. With late detection, leading often to deteriorated nutritional status at the time of management, and therefore a lengthier and more complex treatment. As a result, the most vulnerable groups, particularly children under five and pregnant or lactating women, face a higher risk of their nutritional status worsening without access to the necessary support at the right time. And for children who were treated late, the risk of death or relapse increases.

WHAT ARE THE LIKELY CONSEQUENCES WE MUST ULTIMATELY AVOID?

Ineffective targeting and misallocated resources: Without knowing where the needs are, there is a serious risk that aid efforts will be directed to the wrong areas, while the populations most vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition are overlooked. Without reliable and up-to-date data, the humanitarian system cannot effectively target RUTF deliveries, scale up services to meet real needs, or advocate for timely action. The children most at risk—often living in remote, insecure, or politically neglected areas—are the first to disappear when data systems fail. This is a critical moment. We must act now to reinforce collapsing data and monitoring systems, or risk falling back on a response model based on guesswork, outdated indicators, and growing inequalities.

Inadequate program monitoring and adjustment: Currently, accountability and progress tracking systems rely on data generated by ongoing programs. Without solid data, humanitarian actors are unable to measure results or make timely adjustments, reducing the overall effectiveness of interventions. In this moment of constrained funding, it is more important than ever to ensure that resources reach those who need them most. But that cannot happen without credible data. While efforts may focus on prioritizing high-risk populations, understanding the full extent of needs, including in less visible or underfunded crises is essential. Many humanitarian response plans (HRPs) already operate under chronic underfunding, often receiving less than 50% of required resources¹³ At the time of pushing this document, HRP funding levels in countries like Mali and Niger had reached a historic low of under 20% coverage.¹⁴ Without sufficient data, there is a real danger of leaving behind those whose needs remain unseen and unmet. A fundamental fact that cannot be neglected is that of measuring the coverage of nutrition services. We may believe our actions are effective yet overlook the importance of ensuring our efforts reach everyone in order to achieve meaningful impact. Increased mortality and morbidity: When aid arrives too late, the result is a rise in illness, stunted growth, and preventable child deaths. All these outcomes could be mitigated through earlier detection and timely action. Reliable, timely data is not just informational, it is foundational. It enables early, targeted, and effective interventions. Retrospective

¹³ Underfunding remains a structural challenge in humanitarian response. A 2017 CERF report found that only 2 of 28 response plans received more than half of the required funds. Similarly, the Humanitarian Funding Forecast shows that in the past five years, only 42% of contexts reached 50% of requested funding. The Global Humanitarian Overview 2023 confirms this persistent gap, with inter-agency plans achieving an average coverage of just 45%, severely constraining the ability to meet identified needs.

¹⁴ [List of countries | Financial Tracking Service](#)

analyses and predictive models suggest that in the absence of surveillance systems and anticipatory decision-making, child mortality linked to malnutrition and related diseases can increase by 25% to 50%, depending on the context, seasonality, and local response capacity¹⁵. Without early action, increases in malnutrition-related deaths can range from 25% to 45%, depending on the context and the length of the delay¹⁶.

Increased Human and Financial Cost: Multiple studies and experience across the board demonstrate that anticipatory interventions not only enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian actions but also generate substantial savings in response costs. Evidence from the Anticipation Hub and WFP (2024)¹⁷ shows that anticipatory action increased the share of households with acceptable food consumption by 7% on average, and by 8 percentage points in Nepal (RCT), compared to post-shock response. These gains in Food Consumption Score (FCS) and reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) demonstrate improved nutritional outcomes and operational efficiency when interventions are activated before a crisis.

Weakened platforms for dialogue and coordination: Spaces for dialogue and information sharing will be significantly weakened without robust and up-to-date data to inform technical and strategic discussions. In the absence of reliable information, there is a risk that key decision-making platforms, such as sectoral groups or multisectoral coordination mechanisms, -which rely on joint analysis to prioritize needs define target populations and establish the type and scope of the response- can disappear. This weakening has direct implications for the collective capacity of the humanitarian system to build consensus, coordinate complementary interventions, and avoid duplication or gaps. In this context, the reformulation of cluster mechanisms takes on particular relevance: without a solid technical foundation, their coordination and sectoral leadership role could be seriously compromised- thus limiting the effectiveness of the humanitarian response and reducing the space for inclusive dialogue between local, national and international actors.



Photo property of ACF Pakistan, Malnutrition screening_Lal district_Ghor Province. Nicolas Ossard

¹⁵ Various pieces of evidence underscore how the absence of early detection and anticipatory interventions in nutritional crises translates into significant increases in infant mortality. Retrospective studies in the Horn of Africa, such as those conducted after the 2011 famine in Somalia and the crises in Ethiopia between 2016 and 2017, show that peaks in infant mortality (U5MR) were between two and three times higher in districts where action was not taken in time, highlighting that in Somalia up to 50% of deaths occurred before the official declaration of famine (FSNAU/FEWS NET). Simulations by the WFP and the IPC indicate that failure to activate early warning measures can increase specific mortality rates from malnutrition by 30% to 50% during the peak of crises.

¹⁶ The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) and the literature on *early warning* and *early action* document that acting before indicators reach critical levels can reduce costs by 20% to 40%. Similarly, analysis by the Centre for Disaster Protection (2021) highlights cases with cost-effectiveness improvements of more than 30% thanks to forecast-based action. The joint annual report by FAO and WFP (2019) on *Early Warning Early Action* also shows significant reductions in both costs and losses avoided. A meta-analysis by the Start Network (Start Fund, 2020) reveals that in certain contexts, anticipatory interventions have reduced response costs by up to 53%, consolidating the evidence in favor of preventive strategies against food and nutrition crises.

¹⁷ WFP's evidence base on Anticipatory Action 2015-2024 Synthesis of 16 studies on the effectiveness of Anticipatory Action. April 2025.
[WFP_evidence_base_Anticipatory_Action_2015-2024.pdf](#)

WHAT GLOBAL RECOMMENDATIONS CAN PROTECT NUTRITION DATA?

Nutrition data systems are built on six fundamental pillars that ensure their long-term strength and sustainability. These pillars are: sustainable financing, which ensures the necessary resources to maintain data collection, management and analysis; capacity building fostering sharing capacities, which allows for competent and committed teams at all levels; institutional integration, promoting articulation between sectors and key actors; data quality, guarantees reliable and useful information for decision-making; international commitments, which align national efforts with global frameworks and standards; and humanitarian access, which enables the generation of information even in emergency or conflict contexts..

Without sustained investment in these components, nutrition data systems remain fragile and fragmented, limiting the ability of countries and humanitarian actors to identify trends, target responses and measure the impact of interventions.

Robust nutrition data is not a luxury, it is the foundation for protecting lives and delivering effective, needs-based responses. In the context of constrained resources and increasingly complex crises, there is an urgent need to reinforce the sustainability, independence, and local ownership of data systems. These systems must be fully embedded within both humanitarian and development frameworks. The following six recommendation areas targeting national governments, policy makers, donor countries and the wider nutrition community outline concrete actions to ensure that nutrition data remains a vital global public good—one that enables timely decision-making and prioritizes those most in need.

1

Strengthen sustainable and predictable financing for data systems:

Ensuring the operational continuity of data systems is critical, avoiding gaps in nutritional information during periods of transition or budget crises. Stable and flexible financing facilitates medium-term planning, protects accumulated technical capacities, and reduces the risk of disruptions that could leave the most vulnerable populations without adequate protection. Importantly, such financing should also support decentralized, adaptive models including community led surveillance and mobile-based data collection that can complement national systems and improve data availability in hard-to-reach or underrepresented areas.

- Coordinate donor and policymaker efforts to identify gaps and collectively fund a diversified data ecosystem—including decentralized and community-driven approaches that strengthen local ownership and responsiveness.
- Establish emergency bridge funding to sustain assessments and key surveys during 2025–2026 and beyond.
- Establish flexible, multi-year donor commitments to support independent and coordinated data systems.

2

Develop and consolidate national and local capacities in nutrition data management:

Investing in local capacity reduces reliance on external actors and strengthens the sustainability and local ownership of surveillance systems. It also enhances agility in detecting changes, improves targeting interventions, and enables context-appropriate responses. Integrating nutrition surveillance into national health systems extends coverage and efficiency while building lasting institutional capacity. Digital innovations and strong national leadership have shown great potential to enhance the accessibility, coordination, and effective use of nutrition data across all levels of the system.

- Invest in national and local capacities to collect, analyze, and act on nutrition data, integrating surveillance into health systems where possible.
- Strengthen the identification and direct support of local actors and specifically to CHW (community health workers), ensuring their visibility and inclusion in the ecosystem.

3

Institutionalize nutrition in early warning platforms:

Embedding nutrition in early warning systems enhances predictive capabilities, allowing for action before crises escalate, thereby helping to prevent spikes in mortality and morbidity. Making data availability a funding criterion also encourages its prioritization across humanitarian and national planning.

- Prioritize the integration of nutrition monitoring into national early warning platforms and humanitarian planning tools.
- Make the availability of up-to-date nutrition data an explicit requirement for funding—for both humanitarian partners and government decision-makers.
- To make better use of the analysis and integration of all nutrition-related data, including those considered as early indicators (food security) and those existing at health facility and community level.

4

Consolidate operational principles that protect the quality, independence, and transparency of the data system:

A strong, credible, and transparent data ecosystem is key to improving programmatic decision-making and accountability to affected populations. It also guards against over-reliance on limited or biased perspectives, supporting a more balanced and inclusive response.

- Promote transparency of data, ensuring that it is a public good, shared without restrictions and aligned with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable)¹⁸.
- Conduct regular evaluations to question the continuity of programs.
- Promote cost-effective early warning systems that reflect community needs.
- Establish strong safeguards to protect data systems from programmatic bias, political influence, or institutional pressure, maintaining analytical independence.

¹⁸ [The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship | Scientific Data](#). The [FAIR Principles](#), Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable, offer a set of precise and measurable qualities that a data publication should follow to make data *Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable* (FAIR).

5

Reaffirm strategic international commitments:

Elevating the protection of nutrition data to a political priority is key to ensuring its long-term sustainability. Nutrition information systems must become an integral part of the international architecture for food and nutrition security, not subject to short-term shifts in policy or funding. This includes reaffirming commitments under global agendas that explicitly recognize data as a shared responsibility.

- Reaffirm and implement commitments under the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) agenda¹⁹ and under the collective mandate to protect the data ecosystem as a global public good.
- Strengthen alignment with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), particularly its commitments on data-sharing, transparency, and joint needs assessments, which emphasize the importance of interoperable, inclusive, and timely data to guide responses in displacement-affected settings²⁰.
- Strengthening local, national and international mechanisms where all parties involved in humanitarian responses can contribute and make shared decisions.

6

Guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access and the protection of civilians in all conflict-affected areas:

Ensuring unimpeded humanitarian access and the protection of civilians is fundamental for effective humanitarian action. In many conflict-affected areas, aid obstruction, insecurity, and lack of data transparency continue to delay or prevent the delivery of life-saving assistance. On the other hand, attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure- including but not limited to the use of hunger as a weapon of war continues to pose a major challenge across dire humanitarian contexts. It is thus crucial to ensure compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which guarantees the protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel, and aligns with UN Security Council Resolution 2417, which condemns the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

- Systematically denounce and address any form of aid obstruction, data manipulation, or denial of humanitarian needs, recognizing that such actions undermine life-saving responses and may constitute violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).
- Collaborate with states, humanitarian actors, and other stakeholders to promote transparency, accountability, and timely assistance, ensuring that all parties to conflict facilitate the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to populations in need.
- Humanitarian diplomacy should be used to negotiate access, promote data transparency, and safeguard humanitarian space. Governments and international partners should support open data systems, strengthen local capacities, and ensure that humanitarian responses are coordinated, sustainable, and compliant with international humanitarian law.
- Strengthen remote and community-based data collection using technologies and local networks to overcome access barriers and political constraints. Donors should support these initiatives to improve monitoring and response to conflict-related food insecurity and humanitarian crises.

¹⁹ The Nutrition for Growth (N4G) agenda is a global framework that promotes political and financial commitments to tackle malnutrition. At the 2025 Paris Summit, more than 400 commitments were registered on the monitoring platform (Nutrition Accountability Framework), ranging from significant investments to national policies aligned with nutrition goals and data systems. [Press Release: Nutrition for Growth Summit mobilizes over US\\$27 billion to reach nutrition-related Sustainable Development Goals: Nutrition For Growth](#)

²⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Global Compact on Refugees. United Nations, 2018. Accessed via UNHCR website: [Global compact on refugees EN.pdf](#)

