

Malnutrition in Gaza project 2016-2019- External evaluation Executive Summary June 2019

The three-year **Management of Malnutrition in Children 0-5 years in the Southern Governorates of Gaza Strip** project was funded by Muslim Aid and implemented by MAP's partner Ard El Insan (AEI) in Gaza from May 2016 to May 2019. The goal of the project was to improve the health status of Palestinian children under the age of five in the southern governorates of the Gaza Strip, and specifically to reduce levels of severe/moderate acute malnutrition and stunting (being short for age; caused by chronic malnutrition).

Many of Gaza's residents struggle to afford the nutritious food their families need. As a result, many children are at risk of chronic malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies (e.g. anaemia). One in ten children under five in Gaza is stunted; an irreversible condition linked to lifelong impairments to cognitive, emotional and physical development.

In March 2019, MAP contracted the services of Training and Management Institute (TAMI) consultants to conduct an external evaluation of the project to assess its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The evaluation documented lessons learned and provided practical recommendations to strengthen the implementation of future project phases. This was the first external evaluation of the project conducted by MAP. The data collected routinely by AEI and analysed during the evaluation shows clearly that the project is extremely successful at managing children with malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies but cannot be used to assess community levels of malnutrition (and thus assess impact in terms of prevention).

Methodology

The consultants used a mix of data collection methods;

Quantitative: analysis of data from AEI's patient database and review of secondary data

Qualitative: key informant interviews (MAP and AEI project staff, project beneficiaries, relevant stakeholders), focus group discussions, observation during site visits and case studies.

Results

During the three-year project period, 1,250 malnourished children aged under five and their families benefited from assessment, medical investigation and treatment, nutritional support (vitamins and supplements, dry food packages), health education (including cooking demonstration sessions) and individual counselling.

Quantitative data

The total number of children aged under five treated for malnutrition by AEI has been maintained over the three years of the project. This is attributed to the high demand for their services due to the deteriorating economic situation in Gaza.

Year	Condition Treated			
	Wasting	Growth Faltering	Anaemia	Total
Year 1: 1/4/2016 - 31/3/2017	107	180	123	410
Year 2: 1/4/2017 – 31/3/2018	161	134	144	439
Year 3: 1/4/2018 – 14/5/2019	182	99	120	401

AEI's management information system shows the following rates of patient recovery at the time of discharge:

- 99.9% of children diagnosed with wasting recovered
- 100% of children diagnosed with wasting and being underweight recovered
- 99.5% of children diagnosed with being underweight recovered
- 98.9% of children diagnosed with malnutrition and anaemia recovered
- 99.7% of children diagnosed with anaemia alone recovered

Relapse rates: The relapse rate* for the project over the three years of implementation was as follows:

Year 1: 1/4/2016 - 31/3/2017	2.2%
Year 2: 1/4/2017 – 31/3/2018	15.5%
Year 3: 1/4/2018 – 14/5/2019	16.5%

*children readmitted to AEI for treatment within 6 months of discharge

The increased relapse rates could be attributed to the deteriorating socio-economic conditions within target communities during the last two years of the project; with more families forced into poverty, making it harder to maintain the gains made in their children's health as a result of treatment at AEI.

The rate of defaulting among families was less than 1%, reflecting the commitment of parents and caregivers to manage their children's conditions, and their appreciation of AEI's services.

Analysis of pre- and post-questionnaire results showed an improvement in caregivers' knowledge, attitude and practices regarding care for their malnourished and anaemic children.

Coeliac patients: AEI is one of the only referral centres for coeliac patients in Gaza, receiving referrals from the Ministry of Health and UNRWA. During the three year project, 873 coeliac patients (441 children, 432 adults) benefited from assessment, medical investigation and treatment, nutritional support (vitamins and supplements, gluten free flour), health education (including cooking demonstration sessions) and individual counselling.

An increase in new coeliac patients admitted to AEI's services during this project phase probably demonstrates increased awareness of the condition (and thus more cases being diagnosed) and the high demand for these services, as families are less able to afford gluten free flour at local market rates.

Qualitative data

Quotes from caregivers of malnourished children and from coeliac patients provide evidence of the positive improvement in the patients' health and nutritional status. Beneficiaries appreciate and rely on the range of services at AEI which they find to be of good quality.

However, coeliac beneficiaries highlighted the insufficient levels of gluten free flour provided by AEI. AEI's organisational budget is the limiting factor and many families are unable to afford the prohibitively expensive gluten free flour available locally. As the economic situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, more coeliac patients rely on AEI's diagnostic, educational and treatment services.

Key Recommendations To Be Considered:

Ard El Insan project implementation:

- Improve AEI's management information system to be able to automatically generate customised reports.
- Establish network connection for all AEI's sites for improved centralised data management.
- Include an outreach component and screening for malnutrition in vulnerable communities.
- Include baseline data in the logical framework.
- Enhance the qualitative data collection and documentation in project monitoring and reporting.

MAP's capacity building support to Ard El Insan:

- MAP to support AEI's existing beneficiary feedback and complaint system, incorporating greater accessibility, and a clearly defined complaints handling procedure.
- MAP to support AEI to strengthen its resource mobilisation strategy and diversify its income.
- Encourage the use of AEI collected data for research and academic purposes in order to contribute to policy making and better inform design of future interventions

Conclusion

The Gaza malnutrition project continues to be successful in treating malnutrition in children under five but faces ever increasing demands for its services, given the high degree of vulnerability, food insecurity and the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in Gaza, pushing more families into poverty.