

Plates and spoons to tackle malnutrition in Malawi

January 12 2024, by Charles Pensulo



Cyclone Freddy devastated Malawi in March 2023, impacting over 2.2 million people and displacing around 600,000 individuals who are now faced with malnutrition. Credit: [GovernmentZA \(CC BY-ND 2.0 DEED\)](#)

Plates and spoons designed to help people better feed their children are helping reverse malnutrition in the wake of Cyclone Freddy in Malawi.

Cyclone Freddy devastated Malawi in March 2023, impacting more than

2.2 million people and displacing about 600,000 individuals who sought refuge in more than 700 overcrowded camps across the country.

Malnutrition contributes to an estimated 23% of deaths of children under 5 each year in Malawi, according to Unicef—the UN agency for children. Natural disasters like Cyclone Freddy impact on the ability of displaced people to access [nutritious foods](#).

To effectively respond to the impact of Cyclone Freddy, Unicef supported the Ministry of Health in Malawi to screen 2.4 million children for acute [malnutrition](#).

They identified and treated more than 25,000 children for severe acute malnutrition and educated almost half a million caregivers of children aged up to 23 months on better infant and child feeding practices.

Workers also provided iron and folic acid supplements to more than 54,000 adolescent girls to prevent anemia.

John Kadulila, a local promoter of the project—known as Chithando—from the Nsanje district in Malawi, highlighted the significance of the feeding and learning sessions, where parents with malnourished [children](#) in villages come together to participate in cooking lessons.

Plates and spoons

The sessions involve preparing special meals using maize, groundnuts (peanuts), pumpkin leaves, and eggs. Specially designed plates and spoons with metrics and labels assist parents in following instructions for meal preparation.

Kadulila told SciDev.Net that while some parents do not have enough

food in their homes, other just need to be taught to prepare balanced meals.

He said the specially designated plates show what type of food should be given to various age groups, the frequency, how to clean the plates, a picture of six food groups and a special spoon to show how thick the porridge should be.

"The sessions have proved essential," said Kadulila. "It has turned into an oasis for many families facing food insecurity."

Grace Takomana, the health, nutrition and gender focal person for the Hunger Project-Malawi, implementing the Scale UP Nutrition project, said the complementary feeding and learning sessions significantly reduced the risk of malnutrition and have also proven to treat moderate [acute malnutrition](#).

Takomana said that the intervention takes 12 days to kick in.

"It starts with a nutrition screening exercise for admission into the feeding and learning sessions," she said.

"It is then followed by cooking demonstrations, feeding sessions and subsequent nutrition assessments to monitor changes in nutrition status."

When the weight of her baby drastically dropped following the floods—which wiped out her possessions, including crops at the farm, Lucia Samikuta, one mother, struggled to feed her 5-month-old baby who was becoming malnourished.

Samikuta told SciDev.Net that the Chithando project—the food and the lessons—have assisted her in managing the condition of her 5-month-old baby.

"I think after 12 days, the child will be fine," she said, smiling while feeding the baby from the yellow plate. "I am very confident about that."

Provided by SciDev.Net

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