



N'Djamena at the peak of malnutrition

N'Djamena / Dakar, 16 August 2017. With the beginning of the 'hunger gap', ALIMA (The Alliance for International Medical Action) and its Chadian partner Alerte Santé are seeing an increase in the number of admissions in their nutrition programs in N'Djamena.

Nearly 700 malnourished children admitted every week

The four outpatient nutrition centers located in the outlying areas of the capital, which the medical organization ALIMA is supporting, record nearly 600 admissions per week.

Not far away, ambulances come and go incessantly at the Chad-China Friendship Hospital. Since May, the intensive care units and the nutrition unit at this reference hospital in the Chadian capital, are overloaded with a hospital bed occupancy rate of over 200%. Each week, an average of almost 95 children between the ages of 6 and 59 months are admitted in emergency to the hospital's intensive nutrition unit.

Medical teams are working throughout the day to take care of the many malnourished children. "Almost half of the children admitted to the hospital suffer from diarrhea," says Rachid Yacoubi, head of mission for ALIMA. Diarrhea is one of the major causes of malnutrition in children under the age of five.

An acute shortage of treatment beds

To cope with this influx, ALIMA and the chadian organization Alerte Santé have set up two intensive nutritional units, making available almost 110 beds for patients in the capital. *"We have increased the number of mattresses to cope with the influx but our response has been below what is required. If we want to guarantee quality care we must imperatively increase resources,"* explains Rachid Yacoubi.

Medical teams work tirelessly to provide the best possible care for sick children. *"There are many outpatient centers that detect acute malnutrition, but the hospital capacity to care for malnourished children with complications is still insufficient,"* continues Rachid Yacoubi.

Sustainable solutions

Each year, Chad is affected by a peak of child malnutrition at the end of the hunger gap between May and August, when the last crop reserves are exhausted in the villages. Food insecurity forces many families into exile in N'djamena to find new means of subsistence. They often find themselves confronted with the economic crisis and are forced to live in precarious neighborhoods where sanitation services are non-existent or failing.

To better prepare for emergency and reduce the number of hospitalizations, ALIMA and Alerte Santé teach mothers to recognize the symptoms of malnutrition. Since the beginning of the year, nearly 3,900 mothers have been trained in using the MUAC bracelet - a simple tool that can diagnose a child's nutritional status.

The medical organization has also trained nearly 40 health professionals in the best practices of severe malnutrition management.

"Malnutrition is a public health issue, which is why we work hand in hand with health authorities and families to prevent disease and reduce hospital care needs in areas where health facilities are chronically lacking trained staff and medical equipment," concludes Rachid Yacoubi.

The Alliance for International Medical Action (ALIMA) is a medical humanitarian organization that works hand-in-hand with a network of local health organizations to provide quality medical care to the most vulnerable people during emergency situations and recurrent crises. ALIMA and its partners are also conducting cutting-edge research to improve humanitarian medicine.

Based in Dakar, Senegal, ALIMA has treated over 2 million patients in 12 countries since its creation in 2009 and launched 10 research projects focused on malnutrition, malaria and Ebola.

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