

A conversation with Peter Morrison, November 10, 2020

Participants

- Peter Morrison – Director, Relief and Special Projects, The ELMA Philanthropies
- Julie Faller – Senior Researcher, GiveWell
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Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Mr. Morrison.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Mr. Morrison, Director, Relief and Special Projects, The ELMA Philanthropies, as part of its investigation into community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM). Conversation topics included ELMA's role in malnutrition programming, its relationship with ALIMA, ALIMA's work on Optimizing Treatment for Acute Malnutrition (OptiMA), and the state of funding for ALIMA's malnutrition work in Niger.

ELMA's role in malnutrition programming

The ELMA Relief Foundation, which invests in relief efforts anywhere in the world with an emphasis on Africa, has provided grants to several organizations working in the malnutrition space, including Action Against Hunger (ACF), the Alliance for International Medical Action (ALIMA), Concern Worldwide, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

Combined protocols for malnutrition treatment

The ELMA Relief Foundation is not currently involved in funding Optimizing Treatment for Acute Malnutrition (OptiMA) programs or the Combined Protocol for Acute Malnutrition Study (ComPAS), but it became aware of these new protocols, and their potential for improving effectiveness and cost-efficiency of nutrition programs while providing funding to organizations that are implementing these protocols (including ALIMA and the IRC).

Relationship with ALIMA

Because relief programs are usually short-term, The ELMA Relief Foundation does not typically provide grants to fund organizations' general operations.

However, due to its longstanding partnership with ALIMA, wherein ALIMA has consistently demonstrated a commitment to transparency, a willingness to grow and change, a commitment to diversity and local representation, and an exemplary program implementation, The ELMA Relief Foundation has approved general operating support to ALIMA since 2016 (in addition to regular emergency program funding).

In August 2020, The ELMA Relief Foundation approved a grant to fund an expansion of ALIMA's work providing case management for children suffering from acute malnutrition in N'Djamena, Chad.

Funding for ALIMA's malnutrition work in Niger

Malnutrition in Niger

Niger has consistently high malnutrition rates compared to other countries in the region. This makes it plausible that a funder could categorize malnutrition in Niger as a chronic issue, rather than an acute crisis. However, in Mr. Morrison's opinion, the levels of acute malnutrition in the country indicate that the situation ought to be considered a crisis, regardless of how long it persists. Nutrition programs in Niger appear to have relatively low capacity already, and a reduction in external funding could put those programs at risk.

One of the major funders of ALIMA's malnutrition work in Niger, including its OptiMA RCT in Mirriah district, is a division of the European Union called the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

ECHO has been funding ALIMA's work for the entirety of ALIMA's existence. Over time, as ALIMA has diversified its sources of funds, the percentage of ALIMA's overall budget provided by ECHO has steadily declined, to the point where ECHO in recent years has not provided the outright majority of ALIMA's funding. However, there have been indications that ECHO may decrease its funding for malnutrition programming in the Sahel in 2021.

There is a widespread expectation among those working in the malnutrition space that the COVID-19 pandemic could further exacerbate the nutrition crisis in Niger, and spikes in SAM cases are already observable. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic could make this an especially poor time for donors to reduce funding for malnutrition programming in the country.

Alternative funding sources

To date, The ELMA Relief Foundation was the only funder willing to make a grant for expanding ALIMA's nutrition programming, through the aforementioned grant for malnutrition programming in Chad approved in August 2020.

It seems plausible that many donors have already committed all of their available funding to COVID-19-related efforts earlier in 2020. Other funders may be focused on alleviating the primary effects of the pandemic, rather than on secondary effects like the impending malnutrition crisis. Based on these considerations, Mr. Morrison believes it is unlikely that ALIMA will find alternative funding sources, in the event that ECHO further reduces its support, and would encourage other donors to consider supporting expanded nutrition programming in Niger and elsewhere.

*All GiveWell conversations are available at
<http://www.givewell.org/research/conversations>*