

CENTRAL AFRICA MEDICAL MISSION
LUTHERAN MOBILE CLINIC - MALAWI
February 2019

It's a rainy evening and I can hear thunder in the distance. We've had quite a wet rainy season in Malawi and there were areas where flooding was a problem here in Lilongwe. Because of the rain, the maize crops the farmers carefully planted are growing well in most of the country. People are busy tending their fields. But this is the hungry season here in the rural areas because this year's maize is still a long way off from harvesting and people's maize from last year is becoming used up. If they are too poor to buy maize from those who still have more than they need, there isn't enough to eat.

The Lutheran Mobile Clinic (LMC) distributed ground maize and soya or World Food Program "Supercereal" to 339 malnourished children in 2018. Our Nutritionist, Jean Kanyemba, uses weight, height, and upper arm measurements (MUAC) of children to assess their nutritional status. She teaches mothers about the variety of foods children need in their diet, and demonstrates how to prepare them. While maize "nsima" is a filling food, it lacks many vital nutrients for growth. Jean writes about a new Malawi Government program in which the LMC helps to distribute micronutrient powder for children:

"Malawians still risk a great chance of developing micronutrient deficiencies and stunted growth. Health authorities indicate that currently only 8% of children between 6 and 24 months old are fed with minimum acceptable diets to avoid stunted growth. Currently, micronutrient malnutrition is a public health problem with about 63% of children under 5 years old being anemic. (Ministry of Health, 2017)

Micronutrient powder, or ndisakanizeni (mix me) is a mixture of 15 vitamins and minerals, namely vitamin A, B1, B2, B6, B12, D, E, C, niacin and minerals including copper, zinc, iron, selenium, iodine and folic acid. These are essential for the good health of children aged 6 to 24 months, a transitional period from exclusive breast feeding to complimentary foods. The powder is tasteless and the small packet easily mixes with a small amount of maize porridge or other food. It also helps to improve a child's appetite. One packet is to be given to a child with a meal every other day. All children can receive the micronutrient powder except those who are severely and acutely malnourished and are already receiving other forms of nutrient supplements such as Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF).

The micronutrient distribution replaces a previous governmental initiative which made sure that factory food products such as cooking oil, sugar and bread were fortified with vitamin A. That approach could not benefit each and every child because not all families could afford to buy these products. The micronutrient powder is a way to reach more children with more nutrients, inexpensively. It depends on primary healthcare clinics such as ours who partner with the Ministry of Health to reach many rural children at risk of stunted growth. Educating mothers, screening the health passports of eligible children and handing out the micronutrient packets after under-fives vaccines are given is done with the assistance of the HSAs (Health Surveillance Assistants), our Nutrition officer, and LMC support staff."

The Lutheran Mobile Clinic in Malawi strives to give appropriate preventive healthcare to people in the villages we serve, in order for them to have healthier, longer lives. Our prayer is that their time of grace is extended, that those who haven't yet believed the Gospel will be given that opportunity.

Yours in Christ,

Beth Evans, Nurse in Charge