Improving the quality of nutrition for women and adolescent girls

The “Right Start Initiative” is a comprehensive program reaching nine countries in Asia and Africa, designed and run by the Micronutrient Initiative (MI) in order to improve the quality of nutrition for 100 million adolescent girls and women of reproductive age. In Senegal, MI will invest $1.7M (CAD) over five years to 2020. The program has two parts: first, there will be a weekly iron and folic acid supplementation offered to more than 1.2M adolescent girls attending school in the regions of Dakar, Kaolack, Kolda, St. Louis, Sédhiou, Thies and Ziguinchor. Secondly, commercial wheat flour will be fortified with iron and folic acid throughout the country in order to reach hundreds of thousands of adolescent girls and women of reproductive age.

The Need

In Senegal, close to 60% of women, including adolescent girls, have anaemia, not allowing the country to reach the goal set by the World Health Organization of reducing anaemia by 50% by 2025. Anaemia and folic acid deficiency can be particularly debilitating for women and adolescent girls – the population most at risk – impacting their physical well-being, their performance at work or school, and increasing the possibilities of complications during pregnancy and fetal development.

Our Goal

The program aims to reduce anaemia, complications during pregnancy and births, and neural tube defects, such as spina bifida, in newborn infants. Well-nourished adolescent girls are better able to go to school and get an education. Well-nourished adolescent girls and women are in better health, and thanks to stronger immune systems, are more disease-resistant. Well-nourished women have safer pregnancies, healthier children and are more productive members of society and the workforce. The program will have positive social and economic impacts by eliminating obstacles that malnutrition imposes on women and adolescent girls that prevent them from reaching their full potential and that of the next generation.
Interventions and impact by 2020

1.2M adolescent girls, or 2 out of 3 of all adolescent girls attending school in Senegal, will receive weekly iron and folic acid supplementation over a three-month period, as well as deworming tablets every six months. Adolescent girls will also receive ongoing nutrition education at school offered by 3,200 teachers trained by the National Agency for Medical School Control (DCMS) of the Ministry of Education. In addition, parents will be sensitized to the importance of good nutrition for the health of their daughters through various media campaigns and support groups led by peer educators. Finally, the promotion of the project activities aimed at the beneficiaries and the general public will be made with the support of the Senegalese Association for Family Well-being (ASBEF) and the Task Force on Education and Population (GEEP).

900,000 women of reproductive age and adolescent girls should have access to commercial wheat flour fortified with iron and folic acid. MI will work closely with wheat flour producers to set up equipment for its fortification and internal control before the final product reaches the market. A citizens’ control system will be implemented through a collective of consumer associations. MI will also work with the Senegalese Committee for the Micronutrient Fortification of Food (COSFAM) in order to build the capacities of the overseeing branches of the Government to consolidate legislation and strengthen controls related to the fortification of wheat flour. Fortifying wheat flour is among the easiest and least expensive ways to prevent disease, strengthen the immune system and effectively produce a healthy and productive next generation.

Expectations from the project by 2020

Avert at least 636,000 cases of anaemia in women of reproductive age and adolescent girls.

Reduce the number of cases of newborn infants with neural tube defects associated with a folic acid deficiency, currently at 1,500 per year, to a minimum.

The Right Start Initiative: A catalytic platform for change

The Right Start Initiative is based on five pillars: high-impact programs, resource mobilization, new strategic partnerships, technical leadership, and advocacy.

With $75M (CAD) in anchor funding granted by the Canadian government, MI is launching programs in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal and Tanzania, aiming to reach 50 million women and adolescent girls by 2020. These programs include packages of interventions adapted to each country: weekly iron and folic acid supplementation for adolescent girls, food fortification, iron and folic acid supplementation for pregnant women, as well as solutions to improve nutrition for infants and young children. Building on the anchor funding, MI is reaching out to donors, foundations and the private sector working for global nutrition to leverage this investment with the objective of doubling its reach to 100 million women and girls.

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About the Micronutrient Initiative (MI)

MI is a global leader on nutrition. We deliver high impact interventions and drive new approaches that contribute to the global effort to scale up nutrition. Every year, working in collaboration with donors, governments and partners, we reach close to 500 million of the world’s most vulnerable, especially women and children, with critical nutrition interventions. www.micronutrient.org