



Nutrition International's work to improve
nutrition for adolescent girls

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Nourish Life





INTRODUCTION

Improving adolescent nutrition

Nutrition International believes that access to good nutrition is essential for enabling equal opportunities and bright futures for adolescents. Adolescence is a phase from 10 to 19 years of age and a transition from childhood to adulthood, marked by cognitive, physical, and psychosocial growth and development. After infancy, adolescence is the most rapid period of growth with the highest nutritional needs, providing a second window of opportunity for supporting critical growth and development. With access to adequate information and healthy food systems, adolescence can be a phase for forming healthy lifestyle practices. Until recently, the health and nutrition of adolescents has been neglected in global and national investment, and policy and programming in low- and middle-income countries.

Globally, iron deficiency anaemia is recognized as the number one cause of lost disability adjusted life years in adolescent girls. Anaemia has three

major consequences for the health and wellbeing of adolescent girls: decreased school performance, loss of productivity and participation, and negative maternal and infant outcomes for adolescents who become pregnant. Weekly iron and folic acid supplementation (WIFAS) is one of the limited examples of nutrition interventions with proven effectiveness to impact adolescent girls. WIFAS is recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as one of eight key nutrition interventions for adolescents¹ and is highlighted in UNICEF's nutrition guidance for middle childhood and adolescents.

Despite the WHO recommendation, the policy environment for WIFAS remains a challenge in many countries. India has operationalized WIFAS at a national scale for in- and out-of-school girls and Nutrition International has supported countries in Asia and Africa to develop and implement policies and initiate and expand WIFAS programs



¹ World Health Organization. (2018). Guideline: implementing effective actions for improving adolescent nutrition. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/260297>. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO



for in-school girls while also highlighting the need to reach girls in vulnerable situations, especially those out of school. Along with delivering WIFAS, Nutrition International is supporting adolescents to understand their own growth, development, and potential to benefit from nutrition through access to gender-responsive health and nutrition education delivered through school curriculum, peer youth groups, and community-based and digital platforms.

The education sector is a key partner in improving the health of adolescents and schools can be a key platform for delivering nutrition interventions, yet efforts are also needed to support health systems to be youth-responsive and meet the diverse needs of adolescents from 10 to 19 years of age, especially those who are out of school.

With the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures, the vulnerability of adolescents increased, and programs were challenged to reach adolescents through strained health systems. The need emerged for youth-responsive health systems, innovative partnerships and alternative platforms for health information and services for adolescents, including digital platforms.

Access to education for girls is one of the best long-term strategies to improving nutrition, yet they face several gendered barriers in attending school. Girls have described low social support for attendance, menstrual health barriers, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene, early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, personal safety and economic constraints of families. Even when girls are in school, anaemia and food insecurity can further hold them back from academic achievement, and potential future economic empowerment.

Gender equality, girls' empowerment and youth inclusion

Women and girls can only have equal opportunities to earn, learn and grow when they have adequate nutrition. Nutrition International believes that gender equality and nutrition need to be addressed universally, rather than within the silos of each Sustainable Development Goal. Men and boys are part of the solution to advancing gender equality. When it comes to policy and programs, we follow the approach of *nothing about her, without her*. Nutrition International works with adolescents in the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects, and supports adolescent girls to be empowered advocates for their own health and nutrition.



Global Reach (2015–2021)

Nutrition International is supporting adolescent nutrition programs in eight countries.



11M additional adolescent girls consumed the recommended scheme of WIFAS



7.2M adolescents reached with nutrition education




289K key intermediaries trained

PROGRAM APPROACH

Nutrition International aims to improve the health and wellbeing of adolescents by reducing anaemia in adolescent girls through WIFAS, and enabling adolescents to be empowered through gender-responsive nutrition education that supports girls and boys to understand their growth, development, and potential to benefit from good nutrition and healthy lifestyle practices. Adolescent boys are included in nutrition education and may receive supplements in contexts where their anaemia rate is high.

Nutrition International is providing technical and financial support to ministries of Health and Education, with the collaboration of local partners, to develop and implement enabling policies and programs for adolescent nutrition, including:

- Providing guidance on the scale-up of the most cost-effective strategies within the education and health system, as well as considerations for approaches for vulnerable and hard-to-reach adolescents
- Providing support for supply, delivery, and stock monitoring to ministries at regional and national levels
- Building capacity, training, and supporting teachers, health workers, and primary providers to deliver WIFAS and gender-responsive nutrition education
- Implementing gender-responsive behaviour change intervention strategies to address the specific needs and motivations of adolescent girls, adolescent boys, parents, teachers, health workers and community influencers
- Supporting development and integration of gender-responsive adolescent nutrition curricula for both boys and girls at school, linking in key themes of menstrual health, puberty, and sexual and reproductive health and rights



Adolescent Nutrition and Anaemia Course

Nutrition International is leading the development of key technical resources to support capacity building for program staff, partners and interested stakeholders across sectors. The 15-module [Adolescent Nutrition and Anaemia Online Course²](https://www.nutritionintl.org/ado-course/) was developed by Nutrition International to overcome gaps in the availability of global adolescent nutrition training. Other resources including [Frequently Asked Questions for WIFAS](https://www.nutritionintl.org/learning-resources/) and [deworming](https://www.nutritionintl.org/learning-resources/), case studies from different countries and tools to support the gender mainstreaming process can be found in the Learning Resources section of the Nutrition International website³.

² <https://www.nutritionintl.org/ado-course/>
³ <https://www.nutritionintl.org/learning-resources/>

At the global, regional, and national levels, Nutrition International is collaborating with partners to raise the profile of adolescent nutrition and highlighting the data gaps for decision-makers to understand the current health and nutrition needs of adolescents. Nutrition International is also working with partners in market shaping for the availability of WIFAS and providing thought leadership on the rationale for including WIFAS in the WHO Essential Medicines List to ensure the global supply to scale up WIFAS.



OVERVIEW BY COUNTRY:

Nutrition education and weekly iron folic acid supplementation with support from the Government of Canada



BANGLADESH

Potential reach: 1 million⁴

Platform: In-school delivery and community-based platforms

Partners: Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Education, National Nutrition Services, Institute of Public Health Nutrition, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, World Bank, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University

ETHIOPIA

Total reach: 642,000⁵

Platform: In-school delivery, and out-of-school delivery through health posts and organized outreach sessions by health extension workers and women development team leaders

Partners: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, regional and woreda health and education bureaus and offices

INDIA

Total reach: 8 million⁵

Platform: In-school delivery to adolescent girls and boys through teachers, and out-of-school delivery to adolescent girls through outreach (Anganwadi) centres

Partners: Department of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Women and Child Development, state education departments. Implementing partners in each program state are the Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, Tribhuvandas Foundation in Gujarat, TRIOs Development Support Private Limited in Chhattisgarh, and Child in Need Institute in West Bengal

INDONESIA

Total reach: 1.5 million⁵

Platform: In-school delivery

Partners: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Culture, and Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, and the national family planning agency at the national, provincial, and district levels

KENYA

Total reach: 252,000⁵

Platform: In-school delivery and out-of-school delivery through community-based distribution

Partners: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, county governments

PAKISTAN

Total reach: 6,295⁶

Platform: In-school delivery

Partners: Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, provincial- and district-level departments. The implementing partner is Change Consulting.

SENEGAL

Total reach: 821,000⁵

Platform: In-school delivery

Partners: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Conseil National de Développement de la Nutrition (formerly la Cellule de Lutte Contre la Malnutrition)

TANZANIA

Total reach: 97,700⁷

Platform: In-school delivery and out-of-school delivery through health facilities

Partners: Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children, Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre, Tanzania Food and Drug Authority, Medical Stores Department, Amref Health Africa, and local government authorities. The current focus is on delivering nutrition education and supporting the National Accelerated Action and Investment Agenda for Adolescent Health and Wellbeing.

⁴ 2022-2025
⁵ 2015-2021

⁶ 2020-2021 Pilot project
⁷ 2015-2019





NUTRITION INTERNATIONAL'S PROJECTS

Expanding adolescent nutrition programming in Gujarat

Country: India

Potential reach: 5.5 million

Platform: In-school delivery to adolescent girls and boys through teachers, and out-of-school delivery to adolescent girls through Anganwadi centres

Donor: Comic Relief United States

Partners: Department of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Department of Health and Family Welfare, state education department. The Tribhuvandas Foundation is the implementing partner.

Project: Nutrition International, in collaboration with Comic Relief United States, is working to improve nutrition and health services for adolescents aged 10 to 19 in 15 districts of Gujarat. This program builds on Nutrition International's ongoing work in the state, which began in 2017, and focuses on strengthening WIFAS and nutrition education for school-going adolescent girls and boys as well as out-of-school adolescent girls. Through this project, Nutrition International is continuing to work through schools and Anganwadi centres as service delivery platforms, establishing Nutri-Smart schools in 15 districts, and strengthening Adolescent Health and Wellness Days in three districts under the *Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram*, the national adolescent health program.





Building Rights for Improved Girls' Health in Tanzania (BRIGHT)

Country: Tanzania

Potential reach: 470,000 in school and out-of-school adolescent girls and boys reached with nutrition and sexual and reproductive health and rights information and messages, 31,000 pregnant adolescent girls reached with nutrition counselling and iron and folic acid supplementation, and 127,000 adolescent girls reached with family planning

Donor: Government of Canada

Partners: Engender Health, Young and Alive Initiative, Prosperous Health and Life Initiative

Platform: Schools and health- and community-based facilities

Project: This seven-year project in the Tabora region aims to support integrated adolescent sexual and reproductive health and nutrition initiatives designed to build agency and support adolescents' empowerment to exercise their sexual and reproductive health and nutrition rights. The project is delivering an integrated package, including family planning and access to contraception, gender-based violence prevention and gender-responsive services, adolescent-responsive antenatal, postnatal and postabortion care, nutrition support and counselling, and the promotion of life skills.

Using youth-centered, feminist and rights-based interventions, the project responds to the distinct barriers faced by each age and stage of adolescents, with considerations for diverse needs of younger adolescents aged 10-14 years, and hard-to-reach populations in vulnerable situations, including pregnant adolescents.

The project strengthens gender-responsive and adolescent-responsive governance and accountability systems and structures, increases adolescent participation in community-based accountability platforms and redistributes the burden of unpaid care by addressing deeply entrenched social norms.



Improving the Wellbeing of Urban Youth in Senegal (Fort pour le futur)

Country: Senegal

Platform: School and community platforms

Potential Reach: Up to 153,739 in and out-of-school youth between 10 and 24 years of age. The project expects to reach 80% of youth in schools and 50% of out-of-school youth.

Donor: Botnar Foundation

Partners: RESOPOPDEV, the cities of Pikine, Thiès, and Tivaouane, the Health and Development Institute of the University of Dakar, and the Ministry of Youth, Education, and Health

Project: Building on the successful *Fort pour le futur* project that took place in the city of Thiès from 2019 to 2021, this project aims to improve the wellbeing of urban youth in Pikine, Thiès, and Tivaouane by strengthening cities so that they become safer and healthier places for urban youth who are then empowered to participate and contribute to their cities, and by placing youth at the centre of influencing their own lifestyle changes through co-created, digital-focused, and dynamic urban youth wellbeing behaviour change strategies. Innovative behaviour change strategies, including digital platforms, enable improved wellbeing of urban youth with activities that contribute to reduced overweight and obesity through promoting healthy diets, creating healthy food environments, promoting physical activity and creating safer streets and places for adolescents to be active.



Better Investment for Stunting Alleviation (BISA)

Country: Indonesia

Platform: School-based

Potential Reach: 470,000

Donor: Power of Nutrition with support from Australian Aid

Partners: Department of Health, Department of Education, Save the Children

Project: This is an integrated project being implemented in West Java and East Nusa Tenggara by Nutrition International and Save the Children, with the objective of improving the provision of essential nutrition services for women, children, and adolescents to reduce stunting.

Launched in 2019, the project is now in its third year of implementation. Aligned with the National Strategy for Stunting Reduction 2018 – 2025, BISA aims to develop and deliver an integrated model of essential nutrition actions at community and health facility levels, and create an enabling environment at the policy level in West Java and East Nusa Tenggara. To improve adolescent nutrition, BISA supports in-school WIFAS programs by ensuring effective coordination between puskesmas – or health centres – and schools, training health workers and schoolteachers, improving supply chain mechanisms, and supporting timely and regular monitoring and reporting. Efforts are also made to ensure adherence to iron and folic acid consumption by including parents, teachers, and students in awareness generation activities.

Integrated Nutrition and Gender Project (Projet Intégré de Nutrition et Genre au Sénégal)

Country: Senegal

Platform: Schools and health facilities

Potential Reach: Up to 600,000 adolescent girls and 200,000 pregnant and lactating women, as well as 1,540,000 indirect beneficiaries

Donor: Government of Canada, World Vision, Conseil National de Développement de la Nutrition

Partners: Ministry of Health and Social Action, Ministry of National Education, and 12 key ministries and agencies involved in the nutrition multisectoral strategic plan

Project: PINGS is a seven-year project that launched in 2021 and is being implemented in the regions of Kolda, Kédougou, Kaffrine, Sedhiou and Tambacounda. The project seeks to transform gender relations to better achieve the nutrition and health rights of women and girls in Senegal, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which threatened to bring down the health indicators of mothers, adolescent girls, newborns, and children. The interventions aim to mitigate the shocks caused by this crisis in the short- and medium-term by removing barriers to the low status of women and girls in society, which limit their decision-making and control of resources within households. It also focuses on strengthening their capacity to act through entrepreneurship, training, and advocacy, to support better access to adequate nutrition and to enable the achievement of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The project also aims to strengthen the capacity of the 12 ministries that play a key role in the nutritional status of populations by supporting them to include nutrition in their action plan and encouraging them to coordinate their interventions more effectively.





COMPLETED PROJECTS

Innovative approaches through NLIFT

Nutrition Leverage and Influence for Transformation (NLIFT) was a pioneering initiative of Nutrition International that used innovative strategies and partnerships to integrate nutrition interventions into a multitude of development platforms and pilot new approaches. By expanding opportunities for nutrition impact, NLIFT accelerated progress towards the global nutrition targets through improved nutrition, especially for women and adolescent girls. NLIFT had a range of partners including multilateral organizations such as UNFPA, international NGOs including BRAC, WAGGGS and Girl Effect, private sector organizations, universities, and governments, to optimize linkages in health, education, agriculture and industry to the nutrition landscape. NLIFT's primary geographies for project implementation were Africa and Asia.

A total 14.9 million adolescent girls and their influencers were reached with evidence-based, contextually-tailored nutrition and health information through NLIFT.

MITRA Youth: WIFAS for prevention and reduction of anaemia among school-going adolescent girls in selected districts

Country: Indonesia

Total reach: 400,000 adolescent girls in 10 districts each of East Java and East Nusa Tenggara

Platform: School-based

Donors: Australia Aid and the Government of Canada

Partners: Department of Health, Department of Education

Project: MITRA Youth aimed to improve nutrition for adolescent girls through increased access and consumption of WIFAS, as well as reinstate the government's focus on the program for adolescent girls for improved health and education outcomes through evidence-based advocacy among the district, province and national governments. In addition, MITRA Youth provided nutrition education and health promotion and awareness to both boys and girls, built the capacity of health service providers and schoolteachers to plan, manage, implement and monitor the program, improved counselling skills and knowledge, streamlined the supply chain for WIFAS, and engaged with key officials from the Ministry of Health, and district and provincial health offices to strengthen their commitment to the adolescent WIFAS program.





WAY FORWARD

Increasing access to good nutrition is essential for supporting equal opportunities and bright futures for adolescents, especially adolescent girls.

Nutrition International's adolescent health and nutrition programs will continue to focus on reducing the gender inequalities in adolescent nutrition that hold girls back, through expanding and strengthening anaemia reduction efforts with WIFAS. Gender-responsive nutrition education for adolescents will be delivered through diverse platforms, channels, and partnerships, including schools, communities and digitally. Nutrition education will recognize the effective actions to improve adolescent nutrition, with consideration for the age and stage of adolescents and their food systems, environment, and potential to enable healthy lifestyle choices.

Strengthening school-based adolescent nutrition programs will be complemented by efforts to build in resiliency and support youth-responsive community-based options to reach adolescents

with adolescent-responsive services and information, especially for those in the most vulnerable situations.

The adolescent health and nutrition programs will also use nutrition as an entry-point for bringing voice to gender equality issues that hold girls back from access to school and participating fully in communities, including early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, menstrual health barriers, harmful social norms, and gender-based violence.

Efforts to increase supply availability and overcome procurement challenges of the WIFAS formulation will be directed through Nutrition International's support of adding WIFAS to the WHO Essential Medicines List.

Nutrition International will advocate for increased prioritization of adolescent nutrition at all levels and give voice to youth champions.

About Nutrition International

Nutrition International is a global nutrition organization headquartered in Ottawa, Canada. For 30 years, we have focused on delivering low-cost, high-impact, nutrition interventions to people in need. Working alongside governments as an expert ally, we combine deep technical expertise with a flexible approach, increasing impact without increasing complexity or cost. In more than 60 countries, primarily in Asia and Africa, Nutrition International nourishes people to nourish life.

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