

Canada's Micronutrient Initiative Leads Effort to End Malnutrition in Bolivia

Canadian-made Solution to Hidden Hunger Distributed Nationally in Bolivia

Ottawa, Canada/Santa Cruz, Bolivia, November 11, 2008 -- Canada's Micronutrient Initiative is launching a national program in an effort to end child micronutrient malnutrition in Bolivia using Chispitas, an easy-to-use powder containing life-saving and life-enhancing vitamins and minerals (micronutrients) that is sprinkled on a child's food. Bolivia is the first developing country to offer this multiple micronutrient powder to all children on a national level. The Micronutrient Initiative received a \$5.5 million grant from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to undertake this national program, along with other nutrition interventions that will improve the health of all Bolivians.

"I am proud to say that Canadians are making a real difference in the lives of Bolivian families and children," said Venkatesh Mannar, President of the Ottawa-based Micronutrient Initiative. "With the support of CIDA and Canadian scientists, and in partnership with the Government of Bolivia, the Micronutrient Initiative is able to offer Bolivians the benefit of Canadian innovation in their fight against malnutrition."

The Micronutrient Initiative will officially open a national office in November in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, to oversee the distribution of Chispitas sachets, zinc and vitamin A on a national and universal scale. With CIDA support, the Micronutrient Initiative will also train healthcare workers, and work with nutritionists, doctors and local health workers to promote Chispitas at the local level.

Chispitas are based on a product called Sprinkles™, developed in Canada by Dr. Stan Zlotkin in 1996-97 at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children. Single-use sachets containing a mix of essential vitamins and minerals are now being used across the developing world to enhance children's lives. Chispitas are a simple, cost-effective solution to ensure that children get the nutrients they need in order to grow healthy and strong.

Malnutrition is one of the principle public health problems of Bolivia. Chronic malnutrition and anemia affect between 30 and 52 per cent of children under age five. A child's potential is curtailed from very early in life because of malnutrition. Multiple-micronutrient powders, such as Chispitas, have proven effective in improving the nutritional quality of complementary foods and reducing the burden of anemia in Bolivian children.

The Micronutrient Initiative aims to reduce by half the prevalence of nutritional anemia among children ages six to 59 months by 2012, through universal coverage of Chispitas. More than 50 municipalities will receive Chispitas as part of the first phase of the national roll-out when it begins next month.

"Bolivian children suffer many setbacks because of the consequences of anemia" said Dr. France Bégin, Senior Director of Monitoring and Evaluation for the Micronutrient Initiative. "Chispitas is an easy-to-use solution for caregivers, which provides noticeable results at minimal cost. The impact is immediate and tangible."

The Government of Bolivia has demonstrated its commitment to ending malnutrition through its *Desnutricion Cero* (Zero Malnutrition) project, a direct acknowledgement of the impact that high levels of undernutrition during infancy and early childhood have on the potential for individual and national development. The Micronutrient Initiative worked to have micronutrient malnutrition as a priority in the Government of Bolivia's *Desnutricion Cero* (Zero Malnutrition), the cornerstone of the National Development Plan. In 2009, Chispitas will be produced in Bolivia.

For more information, visit www.micronutrient.org

About Micronutrient Initiative

Micronutrient Initiative is an international not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that the world's most vulnerable - especially women and children - in developing countries get the vitamins and minerals they need to survive and thrive. Its mission is to develop, implement and monitor innovative, cost effective and sustainable solutions for hidden hunger, in partnership with others. Micronutrient Initiative has been in Bolivia since 1997, working to increase child survival rates through the provision of vitamin A and improve child development through the provision of iron and iodine.