

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Program to Reduce Iron Deficiency Anemia Launched in Nepal**

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KATHMANDU, NEPAL - The Government of Nepal, the Nepal Flour Mills Association and The Micronutrient Initiative (MI) are proud to announce the joint launch of a wheat flour fortification program in Nepal. The fortification program is part of the Government of Nepal's Five Year Plan of Action for the Control of Anemia among Women and Children in Nepal. Today, anemia is one of the most serious public health problems in Nepal, affecting 42% of pregnant women and 48% of children under the age of 5. Under the program, roller mills in Nepal will be adding iron, folic acid and vitamin A to the flour they produce (*Maida and Atta*). This ground-breaking program will help reduce iron deficiency anemia and other micronutrient deficiencies in Nepal.

Anemia is a significant obstacle in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, especially those pertaining to loss of productivity, improving learning abilities of children, and reducing maternal mortality. The Demographic and Health Survey 2006 has shown the main cause of anemia is the low intake of iron from daily diets. One of the best ways of delivering additional iron to those who need it most is through the fortification of food with iron and other micronutrients. Wheat flour is an ideal food vehicle for micronutrient fortification as it is the main ingredient in a wide range of commonly consumed foods such as bread, biscuits, noodles, sweets and many more.

Iron deficiency can reduce learning capacity of children significantly leading to class repetition, absenteeism, and drop-outs. Over 20% of maternal mortality cases are attributed to iron deficiency anemia. Folic acid is a member of vitamin B complex and its deficiency may result in a kind of anemia and birth of babies with neural tube defects. Vitamin A not only helps to protect the body against infections and to maintain good eyesight, it also enhances the bioavailability of iron in the body and therefore helps in reducing anemia.

Headquartered in Ottawa, Canada, MI has provided assistance through training and the establishment of monitoring systems and, by procuring microfeeders and premix powder for the initial six month period. Micronutrient Initiative activities are undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The Roller Mills, the main private sector implementing partner, will bear the on-going cost of micronutrient premix in order to ensure long term sustainability. The Government of Nepal will monitor the program and promote the use of fortified wheat flour.

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