

INVESTING IN KENYA'S FUTURE: A UNITED CALL TO ACTION ON VITAMIN AND MINERAL DEFICIENCIES

New Report Shows Micronutrients are Best Low-Cost Solutions to Improved Health in Kenya

September 30, 2009, Nairobi, Kenya – The Permanent Secretary of Public Health and Sanitation, Mr. Mark Bor, the High Commissioner for Canada to Kenya, His Excellency Ross Hynes, and leading development agencies in Kenya launched a new report, *Investing in the Future: A united call to action on vitamin and mineral deficiencies*, today at a reception held at the Serena Hotel. The group committed to moving forward on the life-saving and life enhancing recommendations set out in the report and recognized the incredible benefits that an increased investment in micronutrient programming can bring.

Partners at the report launch included the Micronutrient Initiative, WHO, the World Bank, USAID and UNICEF.

Due to the critical nature of the vitamin and mineral deficiencies, the launch of the report emphasizes and draws attention to the urgent need for action from all levels of government, health and development agencies and the Kenyan community to demonstrate their commitment to children and women in the country by increasing investment in life-saving vitamins and minerals.

“Vitamin and mineral deficiencies are having a profound effect on our country’s people, communities and the economy,” said Chris Wanyoike, Country Director, MI Kenya. “In our current food crisis, it is the most vulnerable who will feel the effects of not having enough nutrition food to eat. We can all take action, at the government, NGO and industry levels to implement proven solutions that cost just a few cents to save lives and help children grow healthy and strong.”

This report is a call to action to governments, NGOs, donors, aid agencies, foundations, industry, community leaders and the agricultural sector for increased investment, renewed commitment and expansion of existing vitamin and minerals supplementation programs.

Currently, almost 85 per cent of Kenyan children under the age of five are vitamin A deficient, putting them at risk of contracting life-threatening disease such as measles; over two-thirds of school-age children in Kenya are anaemic, leading to reduced learning capacity and poor performance in school; and more than half of pregnant women are anaemic, putting them at greater risk of mortality during childbirth. Vitamin A supplementation, a low-cost health intervention that increases a child’s chance of survival, has slipped to a dismal 15 per cent in Kenya.

“Today we are calling for commitment, coordination and planning for increased micronutrient programming—held together by strong and durable partnerships,” said Venkatesh Mannar, President, Micronutrient Initiative. “With the low cost of micronutrient interventions and the high returns, the benefit: cost ratio of micronutrient programming is unmatched by any other large-scale health or economic intervention.”

Key partners in micronutrient interventions include national governments, non-governmental organizations, donors, aid agencies, foundations, industry, community leaders, and the agricultural sector. Research by leading health economists at the Copenhagen Consensus in May 2008, determined that every dollar spent on vitamin A and zinc supplementation programs creates benefits worth more than \$17 and, as such it was deemed the most cost effective intervention in any major areas of development.

Key recommendations for Kenya include:

1. Scaling up the delivery of integrated health services, including twice yearly vitamin A supplementation for children between six months and five years
2. National scale up of zinc supplementation in diarrhea management and ensuring zinc supply

3. Revision of the salt iodization standards and provision of adequate resources to enforce this legislation to ensure all salt is iodized
4. Consolidation of legislation regulating the food fortification, including setting and monitoring national standards for food fortification programmes (beyond salt)
5. Scaling up availability of multiple micronutrient supplements, such as Multiple Micronutrients Powders for in-home use in specified regions
6. Scaling up iron and folic acid supplements for all women of child bearing age, with a special focus on pregnant women

What is needed now is political will, along with sufficient resources and supplies to make sure that all children, especially those in the world's poorest communities, have access to these life-saving micronutrients. Investment now will lead to huge return in healthier, happier and much more productive populations in the future.

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For more information please contact:

Chris Wanyoike
Country Director, Kenya
Micronutrient Initiative
+254 729 110 200

Sabra Saleh
Regional Manager, Communications and Resource Development
Micronutrient Initiative
+254 732 774 695
ssaleh@micronutrient.org