

RECOGNIZING THE COST OF STUNTING AND THE NEED FOR COORDINATED ACTION:

Oromia Regional State Government Launching Event: National Nutrition Program (NNP), 2013-2015

January 4, 2014, Adama: Following the launch of the revised national NNP in June 2013, the Oromia Regional State Government officially launched the regional NNP with key technical support provided by ENGINE, USAID's flagship multi-sector nutrition project led by Save the Children, which stands for *Empowering New Generations to Improve Nutrition and Economic Opportunities*. Through ENGINE's illuminating baseline findings and practical field examples, the regional government soon recognized the serious cost implications of undernutrition and embraced the urgent need for coordinated action.

Oromia Health Bureau Head, Mr. Shallo Dhaba, Deputy Bureau of Agriculture, Mr. Ababa Diriba and Deputy Bureau of Education, Dr. Jamal Adam, all highlighted concerted efforts made by their sectors in light of the five-year Growth and Transformation Plan and pledged their commitment to address undernutrition through community participation with coordination from all sectors.

Mr. Shallo Dhaba specifically mentioned how undernutrition impacts all sectors especially agriculture, education and health. He underlined the key roles and results expected from each sector. He also emphasized the significance of human capital development to improve and sustain economic growth asserting that sustainable development is only made possible by addressing the high rate of stunting. He said, 'nutrition is not necessarily about the 'haves' and 'haves not'. We have observed children from well-off families also affected by undernutrition due to poor child and maternal feeding practices'.

Mr. Ababa Diriba, highlighted the significance of improved production and productivity in the region through the Agricultural Extension Program and Growth Transformation Plan, which have contributed to the country's fast economic growth. Mr. Ababa said agriculture is a pillar for the national development absorbing over 80 percent of the workforce. He added, the Oromia Agriculture Bureau is committed to play its part to ensure that its workforce is healthy and productive, focusing both on food security as well as nutrition security. He



Picture 1: Key note address by His Excellency Mr. Shallo Dhaba

Picture 2: Key note address by His Excellency Abebe Diriba



Picture 3: Some of the participants at the launching event, Aba Geda Meeting Hall.

also emphasized that to reduce undernutrition, all sectors must work together and be accountable.

The Ethiopian Health and Nutrition Research Institute representative, Dr. Aragash Samuel, presented the findings of the 'Cost of Hunger' study revealing the hidden cost of undernutrition for the health, agriculture and education sectors and the country's development. The compelling results left key decision makers to pause and critically consider whether to pay for the consequences of undernutrition (16 percent of Ethiopia's annual gross domestic product) or to invest in eradicating undernutrition to improve and sustain the current economic growth.

Mr. Girma Habtamu, from the Oromia Health Bureau for Nutrition, presented the regional prevalence of undernutrition and provided an overview of the revised NNP with the rationale for revisions, its principles and strategic objectives.

Save the Children presented ENGINE's project baseline survey findings and shared experiences and lessons-learned from nutrition multi-sector linkages and technical support provided to the health, agriculture and education sectors to implement nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. ENGINE's woreda-specific baseline survey findings, relating to low dietary diversity for mothers and children in productive woredas attracted the audience's attention.

Dr. Zelalem Habtamu, in his closing remark, urged all participants represented from all regional sector bureaus and their decentralized structures, to translate the NNP document into practical actions in a timely manner. He asked the sectors to disseminate the NNP at all levels and to establish a nutrition multi-sector body and technical committee.

The one-day event was accompanied by musical entertainment from the Urjii Adama band and broadcasted through Oromia TV and radio. Local papers and other media channels are also expected to disseminate release news of the launch.



Fig 4: Dr. Zelelm Habtamu, Deputy Head of Health Bureau, delivering the closing remarks

The ENGINE project in partnership with the Integrated Family Health Program, Alive and Thrive project, UNICEF, Micronutrient Initiatives project and World Bank provided technical and financial support for the regional NNP launch and dissemination. ENGINE is also a member of the regional nutrition multi-sector committee.

