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Responding to the Food Price Crisis by Accelerating Vitamin and Mineral Fortification of Staples: Senegal and Mauritania

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1. Introduction

Micronutrient deficiencies are a matter of major public health concern in many developing countries. West Africa is among the regions with the highest public health impact of micronutrient deficiencies.

In Senegal and Mauritania, the precarious nutritional situation has been compounded by the important increase in food prices in 2008 combined with the two successive bad rainy seasons. A large proportion of the population suffers from vitamin and mineral deficiencies especially iron deficiency anemia, zinc deficiency and vitamin A deficiency. Women and children, who have special nutritional needs, are particularly at risk, with implications for maternal health and well being, as well as the survival, growth and development of children. Vitamin and mineral-rich animal foods are particularly beyond the reach of the poorest populations, the added problem of higher staple food prices will increase the severity of the micronutrient malnutrition such as iron and vitamin A deficiency. This situation could slow progress toward achieving the MDGs; in particular, those related to child mortality and maternal health.

Helen Keller International's project "**Responding to the Food Price Crisis by Accelerating Vitamin and Mineral Fortification of Staples: Senegal and Mauritania**" addresses these challenges. The goal of this project is to mitigate the impact of the food price crisis on iron, zinc, and vitamin A deficiencies through the fortification of wheat flour with iron/folic acid and zinc in Senegal and Mauritania, and edible oil with vitamin A in Senegal. The project started in July 2009 with a total funding of \$ 1,864,049, and is coordinated by the Senegal office of Helen Keller International in collaboration with the West Africa regional office of OFDA and the UNICEF office in Mauritania. This report covers progress made during the fourth quarter of the first year of the project, from the 1st April to 30th June 2010.

2. Year One, Fourth Quarter Activities

2.1 SENEGAL

2.1.1 Purchase equipment and premix for flour producers in Senegal

Following the flour millers GMD and NMA, Sentenac has now been funded to purchase premix and microfeeders and has been producing fortified flour since April 2010.

2.1.2 Provide financial to the Senegalese National Fortification Alliance to participate to a regional partners meeting on food fortification

The project supported the participation of the Senegalese National Fortification Alliance (COSFAM) in a regional meeting on food fortification for the UEMOA zone (Monetary and Economic Union of West Africa) from 28th to 30th June 2010. The aim of this meeting was to review the status of the HKI regional initiatives and share experiences among the member countries. The delegates included representatives from government (Food Technology Institute, Senegalese Association of Standardization, Ministry of Trade, Committee for the Fight Against Malnutrition), private sector and a consumers' association.

2.1.3 Training on nutrition leadership and food fortification

HKI's project coordinator participated in this training held from 19th to 26th in Rabat (Morocco) to build capacity for advocating for the advancement of food fortification. The program was organized by the United Nations University in partnership with the African Nutrition Leadership Program and the International Union of Nutritional Sciences. Experiences and best practices were shared among participants from many African countries.

2.1.4 Follow up of the formative research to assess public perception of fortified foods in Senegal

The qualitative research on public perception of fortified foods was carried out in June with focus groups in two rural, two semi urban and two urban zones of Senegal. The data analysis is underway and the final report is expected to be finalized during the next quarter. Quantitative research building on the qualitative findings will be launched in the next few months, to include a survey with a sample (n=1200) that will be representative at both national and regional levels. The survey will cover consumer purchase, attitudes and practices regarding fortified foods. The research findings will be used to develop the social marketing/communication plan to promote fortified foods in Senegal.

2.1.5 Support the fortified foods production launch ceremony

The official ceremony has been postponed due to the unavailability of the Ministry of Industry during the quarter. However, HKI provided technical support to the Senegalese National Food Fortification Alliance to plan and develop materials for the launching ceremony.

2.1.6 Development of communication/social marketing plan and tools

Tools to be used to promote the fortified flour and edible oils in the Senegalese market have been developed together with a communications tool to support promotion through the health information service of the Ministry of Health, which has a national network.

2.1.7 Media campaign for the promotion of the consumption of fortified foods through the "Caravane de l'Intégration"

In partnership with a regional francophone television station "Africable", the project has contributed to the "Integration Caravan" designed to promote the regional fortification logo and the consumption of fortified foods in Senegal and 7 other West African countries. This activity was launched on 8th May under the auspices of the Head of State of Senegal. HKI staff participated in television interviews discussing the various initiatives on food fortification and the support received from the American People through the U.S. Agency for International Development for the reduction of micronutrient deficiencies.

2.2 MAURITANIA

2.2.1 HKI mission to Mauritania

HKI staff visited Mauritania from March 21st to 28th. During the visit the Ministry of Industry signed a decree mandating the fortification of flour and oil; HKI and UNICEF/Mauritania signed an MOU; and the project supported establishment of a national committee on standards for fortified foods and plans for premix and equipment purchase by key producers.

2.2.2 Support the millers to be provided with equipment and premix

HKI provide technical support to flour millers to define needs for equipment and premix. The procurement planning process is continuing.

2.2.3 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) HKI - Unicef/Mauritania

HKI and UNICEF/Mauritania signed an MoU on 16th May 2010 to formalize the partnership to accelerate food fortification in Mauritania. UNICEF/Mauritania will serve as the institutional focal point for HKI's project in Mauritania.

2.2.4 Signing of the decree making mandatory food fortification in Mauritania

During the quarter, the decree making mandatory the fortification of wheat flour and edible vegetable oils was passed by the Government of Mauritania. The decree is critical to creating the enabling environment for food fortification.

2.2.5 Technical support to the Ministry of Industry to develop national standards for fortified wheat flour and cooking oil

In collaboration with the Ministry of Industry, HKI supported the creation of the National Committee on standards for fortified foods, currently edible oils and wheat flour. The Senegalese Association of Standardization (ASN) and HKI will provide technical support to elaborate and validate the standards.

2.2.6 Purchase equipment and premix for Mauritanian flour producers

Two protocols have been developed between HKI and the two millers (Grands Moulins de Mauritanie and Moulins du Sahel) to fund the purchase of premix and equipment. The millers should benefit from tax exemption and the Ministry of Finance will release a special authorization before the beginning of the ordering process.

2.2.7 Baseline study of micronutrient status in Mauritania

This activity is awaiting approval from the Ministry of Health

3. Activities planned for the next quarter (1st April – 30th June 2010)

Activities	Date	Responsible
1. Sign contracts with the millers to purchase equipment and premix in Senegal	July – Sept. 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKI Food Fortification Coordinator • HKI Food Fortification Officer
2. Purchase equipment and premix for the two flour producers in Mauritania	July – Sept. 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKI Food Fortification Coordinator • HKI Food Fortification Officer
3. Finalize and manuals on flour fortification process for Senegal and Mauritania	July – Sept. 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKI Food Fortification Coordinator • HKI Food Fortification Officer • UNICEF staff in Mauritania
4. Support the fortified foods production launching ceremony in Senegal	July – Sept. 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKI Food Fortification Coordinator • HKI Food Fortification Officer
5. Support a communication/social marketing plan and tools in Senegal	July – Sept. 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKI Food Fortification Coordinator • HKI Food Fortification Officer
6. Provide support to undertake formative research to assess the perception of Senegalese population of fortified foods	July – Sept. 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKI Food Fortification Coordinator • HKI Food Fortification Officer
7. Support the development of the Mauritanian standard on fortified wheat flour	July – Sept. 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKI Food Fortification Coordinator • HKI Food Fortification Officer • UNICEF staff in Mauritania
10. Support the Ministry of Industry in signing the decree to build a National Food Fortification alliance in Mauritania	July – Sept. 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKI Food Fortification Coordinator • HKI Food Fortification Officer • UNICEF staff in Mauritania