



Saving Lives Through A2Z

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To save and improve the lives of vulnerable people through state-of-the-art micronutrient and child blindness programs

FROM THE DESK OF PHIL HARVEY, PhD, A2Z TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

A2Z AND THE MICRONUTRIENT FORUM

The A2Z project, with partner ILSI, served as the Secretariat for the Micronutrient Forum, an international meeting in Istanbul, Turkey from April 16-18, 2007. Over 700 participants attended, including representatives from international agencies, national ministries, educational and research institutions, food and chemical industries, and non-governmental organizations. The theme of the conference was, Consequences and Control of Micronutrient Deficiencies: Science, Policy, and Programs— Defining the Issues.

A2Z project staff as well as partners were speakers, poster presenters, and facilitators of satellite meetings. The meeting fostered the exchange of new ideas, described innovations, presented the latest research findings and survey data, and promoted action programs that translate research findings into practical applications. The meeting further enhanced global partnerships and capitalized on alliances to strengthen the design and implementation of strategies to reduce vitamin and mineral deficiencies. This issue of the Bulletin highlights A2Z activities that supported and furthered conference objectives.



The Micronutrient Forum was formed in 2006 as the successor to the International Vitamin A Consultative Group (INACG) and the International Nutritional Anemia Consultative Group (INACG) and focuses on all micronutrient deficiencies of public health significance— particularly vitamin A, iron, folate, iodine, and zinc. The Micronutrient Forum aims to serve as a stimulus for policy-relevant science and as the internationally recognized catalyst for moving the global community towards consensus around evidence-based policies and programs that reduce micronutrient deficiencies around the globe. More information about the Micronutrient Forum can be found at www.micronutrientforum.org.

ACCELERATING MICRONUTRIENT PROGRAM ACTION THROUGH TWINNING INTERVENTIONS

Funds provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation permitted greater participation of representatives from selected developing countries and a broader range of technical and program leaders to attend the meeting. Support from the Gates Foundation also allowed several twinning sessions at the conference to use the opportunities provided by the Forum to catalyze program action.

A2Z brought together, or ‘twinned,’ key decision makers and program implementers from four sets of selected countries. In each set, one country was selected as having an opportunity to advance programs addressing a particular micronutrient deficiency, and the other was selected as having successfully implemented programs addressing that deficiency. These countries included:

- Nigeria / Tanzania (vitamin A supplementation)
- Cambodia / Thailand (anemia reduction)
- Uganda / Bangladesh (zinc for diarrhea)
- Tanzania / Uganda & Kenya (fortification)

A secondary purpose of these interventions was to test this twinning approach as a means of accelerating program action at the country level. Over 40 Forum participants took part in the four meetings with the Gates Foundation providing travel support for ten of them. Global partners such as GAIN, MI, UNICEF, and the Nutrition Mainstreaming Initiative of the World Bank supported other participants.

Nigeria and Tanzania: Twice Annual Vitamin A Supplementation

This twinning session developed specific action items for the Ministries of Health in Nigeria and Tanzania. It was planned that representatives from each country would be on hand to observe and assist with planning and monitoring rounds of vitamin A distribution. In Nigeria, a focal person was proposed to coordinate and promote national partnerships, help the Ministry of Health with state-level advocacy, and monitoring and reporting for each round.

At a policy level, Nigeria will define and institutionalize specific vitamin A distribution days in coordination with other health activities. An analysis and review of existing budgets also will be conducted to identify spe-

cific resources needed to successfully implement each round of vitamin A supplementation.

Cambodia and Thailand: Reducing Maternal Anemia

This twinning session, which included participants from the Ministries of Health, USAID, UNICEF, WHO, and A2Z, identified a national comprehensive behavior change and communication (BCC) strategy that targets mothers, communities, village volunteers, health staff, and program managers. The absence of such a strategy is considered a primary barrier to effectively reducing maternal anemia at this time.

In addition to a BCC strategy, concurrent efforts will continue to develop an overall anemia policy, strengthen logistics (e.g. primarily supplies of iron/folic acid), integrate the national standard guidelines for iron/folic acid supplementation into all relevant documents, and build capacity in training, outreach, supervision, fortification, and school- and employment-based interventions.



Participants of the Cambodia and Thailand twinning session

Uganda and Bangladesh: Introducing Zinc for the Treatment of Diarrhea

Discussions resulted in agreement that representatives from Bangladesh will provide technical assistance in conducting formative research on the use of zinc in diarrheal treatment and identifying ways to procure zinc from the public and private sector. Uganda will share training materials for health staff to treat and control diarrhea. Staff in both countries will collaborate to conduct training, design marketing and communication plans, and develop monitoring and evaluation plans.

East African Session (Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda)

In order to help Tanzania strengthen its fortification program, the following were agreed upon:

- Strengthen the National Food Fortification Alliance (NFFA), which will be supported by the ECSA Secretariat, based in Arusha
- Establish standards, food quality control and laboratory capacity, to be led by ECSA with support from Uganda and A2Z staff.
- Coordinate efforts between ECSA and the Micronutrient Initiative to train industries on the fortification process

EXPANDING THE KNOWLEDGE BASE OF MICRONUTRIENT PROGRAMS THROUGH SATELLITE SESSIONS

In collaboration with global partners, A2Z developed and presented three satellite meetings at the Forum.

Critical Issues in Strengthening Micronutrient Programming

This workshop discussed issues and new tools that increase rigor in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of micronutrient programs. The focus was on understanding structures and processes—as distinct from outcomes or impacts—because process is critical both to improving program implementation and to the evaluation of program impact.

The session concluded that since micronutrient programs were first introduced into public health systems two decades ago, their structures, operations, strategic approaches, and the level of their general acceptance by both policymakers and the general public have changed. As the role and significance of micronutrient programs has evolved so too have the needs of program managers and policy makers.

With a host of programs being implemented in many countries and with different platforms and degrees of success, there are many lessons to be learned from cross-country comparisons. There is also a need for developing and applying more systematic, detailed studies of cost, operations research, and other process evaluation methods. The relationships between program structure, operations, implementation, coverage, and impact needs to be better understood if programs are to be strengthened and made more sustainable

financially, organizationally, and politically.

Mobilizing Communities to Reduce Anemia

This satellite session shared experiences and stimulated critical discussion focused on anemia, community-based approaches, and key issues, such as the evidence of impact, sustainability, replicability, scaling-up, and use of a theoretical evidence base. Six presentations were made, including the report of a literature review providing a theoretical framework for concepts of participation and empowerment, and descriptions of community-based programs in Nepal, India, Tanzania, Uganda, and Burkina Faso.

From the presentations and subsequent discussion, it was concluded that:

- Process is important and will influence trust. Participatory methods can be useful for encouraging ‘buy-in’ and building that trust
- Support and/or inputs are needed for community participation, i.e., “communities” cannot be expected to conduct the process in isolation
- It is important to integrate nutrition/child survival activities/potential health benefits with other kinds of benefits (i.e., sanitation, income generation, etc.) and develop intersectoral links

Food Fortification in the Developing World: Learning From the Past to Support Critical Decisions for the Future

This session featured presentations by food fortification professionals working in Central America. This region has implemented food fortification programs earlier than other developing countries or regions.

With over 50 years of experience in food fortification programs, Central American countries can provide vital information for other countries to imitate and avoid program errors.

Discussion topics included practical applications and solutions in the areas of food standards and regulations; food control and enforcement; and monitoring and evaluation of the programs.

OTHER MEETING HIGHLIGHTS



A2Z staff presented several posters at the Micronutrient Forum, including:

- Technical Determination of Standards for Mass Fortification of Foods and Premixes (The Food Fortification Formulation Calculator) by O. Dary
- Barriers to High Coverage of Vitamin A Supplementation: A Comparative Profile of Selected Districts in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, India by V. Joshi, S. Muttoo, and A. Jain
- Launching a Community-based Anemia Program for Scale-up in the State of Jharkhand, India by M. Shukla, A. Bhagat, P. Beck, B. Tirkey, R. Tandon, L. Palo, A. Stormer, and P. Harvey
- An Innovative Training Strategy to Increase the Quality of an Anemia Program in Jharkhand, India by R. Shrestha, P. Harvey, M. Shukla, A. Singh, P. Beck, and L. Palo.
- No Effect of Iron-Folic Acid and Zinc Supplementation on the Language Acquisition of Young Nepali Children by E. Siegel, R. Stoltzfus, J. Katz, S. Khatri, SR Shrestha, S. LeClerq, and J. Tielsch
- Improving National Vitamin A Supplementation Programme Monitoring: Conclusions of an Informal Consultation of the Global Alliance for Vitamin A by A. Palmer, N. Dalmiya, S. Baker, I. Darnton-Hill, T. Goodman, P. Harvey, and L. Laviolette

- Vitamin A Supplementation Coverage: Using Rapid Post-Event Surveys and Other Methods to Examine Coverage and Strengthen VAS Programmes by R. Houston, A. Greig, S. Baker, N. Dalmiya, and J. Kavle

These posters, along with others, are available at the Micronutrient Forum web site at: <http://www.micronutrientforum.org/>.



A2Z showcased technical briefs and promotional materials at the Project's exhibit booth. Over 200 briefs were distributed at the conference. The technical briefs as well as other information on micronutrients can be found at the A2Z web site at: www.a2zproject.org.

