

A Holistic Approach to Combating Vitamin A Deficiency is Needed in Nigeria

Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) is a serious public health problem, with 30% of Nigerian pre-school aged children deficient in this micronutrient.

VAD increases risk of disease, visual impairment and death in children, and night blindness in pregnant and lactating women. Like other forms of under-nutrition, VAD undermines the country's future economic and social development.

Strategies for Addressing VAD in Nigeria



Receiving a Vitamin A capsule

Vitamin A Supplementation

- Providing Vitamin A capsules twice a year to children under 5 is one of the most effective ways to increase child survival and reduce child mortality by an average of 24%
- High annual coverage, 91% in 2010¹
- Providing supplementation to the poorest and hard to reach areas is a challenge
- The benefits of supplementation in reducing VAD are temporary (2-3 months)

Food fortification

- Fortification of wheat and maize flour with iron, vitamin A, and B vitamins; and vegetable oil and sugar with vitamin A, is currently ongoing in Nigeria
- Central processing means many people from the urban population are reached with the needed Vitamin A
- As young children can only eat small quantities of fortified foods, fortification should be combined with other interventions to reduce VAD

Food-based approaches to VAD

- Many Vitamin A rich foods such as mangoes, papaya, orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP), pumpkins, dark green leafy vegetables, eggs,

meat, and milk are available. However, meat and eggs are expensive for most Nigerians

- One small root of most OFSP varieties can meet the daily recommended allowance for Vitamin A of young children
- Malnourished rural/resource poor populations can grow and eat bio-fortified crops such as OFSP, and sell surplus roots
- To create demand and scale up OFSP adoption, there is need for media campaigns, demonstrations, long-term investment in breeding, vine multiplication and nutrition education



Nigerian girls enjoying OFSP

Why is a holistic approach needed to combat Vitamin A deficiency?

- Since each of the three approaches to addressing VAD has limitations when used in isolation, there is need to combine Vitamin A supplementation, fortification and food-based approaches to achieve greater success
- Other interventions for addressing VAD include exclusive breastfeeding of infants under 6 months, continued breastfeeding up to two years and beyond, and dietary diversification
- Improved health services is an important part of a holistic approach since illness contributes further to VAD



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¹ UNICEF, State of The World's Children Report, 2012