



Colombia

Fighting Anemia in Children



BEST PRACTICES

IN ACTION

The Story

Background

In 2014 WFP partnered for the first time with a local government to prevent and reduce anemia in children between the ages of two and five years. The prevalence of anemia in children is still a serious problem in Colombia, affecting 27.5 percent of children under five. Such micronutrient deficiencies harm the physical and intellectual development of children and potentially compromising their future. The programme with the Government of Bolívar complemented national efforts in this Department aimed at children between six months and two years of age and WFP with its extensive experience delivering micronutrient powders (MNPs, a mixture of vitamins and minerals) ensured that micronutrients and deworming tablets reached vulnerable children, in the most remote parts of the department.

Intervention

By delivering an integrated nutrition package, which included locally produced MNPs called Chispitas de Vida (Sprinkles of Life), as well as deworming tablets and health education trainings for families, the programme changed dietary habits, and recover the nutritional status of young children. A diverse team was able to bring the assistance package to even the most difficult to reach communities in 45 municipalities. They relied on different means of transportation, including donkeys or boats. An innovative public communication campaign, involving radios, TV channels, moto-taxi drivers and "voz a voz" (voice to voice) among families and neighbors spread nutrition and healthy living messages to the deepest corners of Bolívar.

Results

Seven months after the start of the programme, blood samples showed that iron deficiency in targeted children was halved in 61,000 children; from 25.5 percent to 11.2 percent. Parents declared that, the odorless and tasteless "Chispitas" were easily consumed by their children who ate them as part of their normal meals. Quickly the children put on weight and were much more energetic.

Lessons Learned

The programme demonstrated the importance of aligning interventions with national and local health systems. WFP's involvement in both the national and local programme in Bolívar ensured there was no duplication between the two. Importantly all children from six months to five years vulnerable to micro-nutrient deficiencies were reached. This large-scale collaboration between WFP and a local government was very successful due to the dedication of local leaders, in particular the leadership of the First Lady of Bolívar. Similarly the clear attribution of roles between WFP and government staff, as well as frequent coordination meetings and timely communication about problems led to efficient implementation. The field teams and the local authorities' knowledge of the area and of communities was crucial for engaging families and ensuring their participation in the programme. Another success factor was the emphasis on capacity strengthening actions with decentralized governments. Building ownership within local teams helped to bring about appropriation and long-term sustainability of the programme by the government staff. They are already working to strengthen the programme for the future.



Mother adds Chispitas to her daughter's meal.



Health workers collect the baseline data.



A child participant of Chispitas

Implementation

Step 1

Adapting the “*Chispitas de Vida*” strategy to the local context, together with the staff from the Government of Bolívar. Training of the operational team – health and social professionals, facilitators.

Step 2

Identification of beneficiary children, and baseline of anemia levels. The local government creates a public information campaign, including videos and songs. Information sessions for municipal authorities and health professionals.

Step 3

First distribution of “*Chispitas*” for 60 days, as well as deworming medicine. Trainings to parents and caregivers.

Step 4

Intermediate evaluation of the programme: follow up of the proper consumption of MNPs in homes and child care centres.

Step 5

Second distribution of “*Chispitas*” for another 60 days.

Step 6

Final evaluation, including blood samples which allow to measure the decrease in anemia levels.

“Thanks to the supply of *Chispitas de Vida* we are reducing malnutrition levels in Bolívar”

First Lady of the Department of Bolívar, Ana Elvira Gómez de Gossaín

Highlights



61,000 children identified in the Department of Bolívar received *Chispitas de Vida*



Donkeys transport *Chispitas* and deworming to isolated and hard to reach communities.



Mothers explain how visible the improvements in their children's health have been.



Field Monitors visit homes to explain the use of *Chispitas*.



No taste, no smell: children have no issue with eating *Chispitas* inside their normal meals



Levels of iron deficiency in targeted children were cut by half within seven months

Partnerships

Strong political commitment from the top of the Government of Bolívar ensured the collaboration of mayors, first ladies and representatives of the 45 municipalities involved, of childcare and health centres as well as of social entities and programmes.

Sustainability

As the funds were provided by the Government of Bolívar, the sustainability of the programme will depend on the political will of the next administration. Likewise, this innovative approach is adaptable and replicable to other departments of Colombia, provided there is political and financial commitment from local governments.

Inputs

Knowledge

Data on social and health status of families, educational messages through trainings, follow up of focal groups of beneficiaries.

Materials

Chispitas de Vida (micronutrient powders), deworming, audiovisual materials, educational leaflets.

Resources

Technical advice to and daily articulation with staff from the Government of Bolívar and from 45 municipalities, as well as with health entities.