

PRESS RELEASE FROM PRIVATE SECTOR AT MICRONUTRIENT FORUM

PRIVATE SECTOR UNITES TO TACKLE “HIDDEN HUNGER”

All must play their part to address forgotten Millennium Goals

14 May 2009, Beijing - the private sector must come together to use its influence and contacts, and not only its scientific expertise, working in partnership with public agencies and NGOs if the world is to address the “forgotten Millennium Goal” of hidden hunger, according to a Joint Declaration signed today by some of the world’s biggest food and nutrition companies.

The companies involved – DSM, Unilever, Pepsico, Amway and Interflour – have committed themselves to re-invigorating the private sectors contribution to tackling hidden hunger. More specifically, they have agreed to expand their ongoing collaboration with all stakeholders and called for the alignment of global projects and programmes towards the elimination of hidden hunger. In addition, they urged all those public bodies tasked with addressing hunger and members of civil society who care about this issue, to join with them to raise the profile of the problem of hidden hunger which is ‘not high enough on the Government agenda, the development agenda, nor on the media’s agenda’.

The companies released the declaration on the occasion of the Micronutrient Forum 2009, in Beijing, which brings together all of the actors involved in addressing the problem of micronutrient deficiency which affects two billion people worldwide. Often called ‘hidden hunger’, micronutrient deficiency describes a pernicious condition where people seem healthy because they get each day enough calories to live – but in reality their poor diet means they are missing out on key minerals and vitamins that, particularly for the young, have extremely serious health consequences.

Nutritional scientists now understand that lack of key vitamins and minerals causes both physical and mental under-development, meaning stunted growth, learning difficulties and much higher propensity to suffer chronic diseases like cancer, stroke and diabetes – and, arguably counter-intuitively, a much higher chance that the sufferer will end up obese in later life. Inevitably, the poor suffer most: hidden hunger presents not just an appalling social cost, but also huge economic costs due to lost economic production and soaring health costs in countries that can least afford either.

The declaration (attached) underlines that no one sector – neither public, nor private – will be able to solve this problem alone. Public agencies’ commitment to deliver food to the world’s poorest needs to be allied with the innovation and R&D of food and nutrition companies, who understand how to create food and food supplements that can meet these crucial needs. Moreover both need to come together to raise the profile of what is in danger of becoming a forgotten issue.

Stephan Tanda, Board Member at DSM, the world's largest supplier of vitamins and minerals, speaking on behalf of the signatories said:

“It is time for the world to wake up and address this silent disaster. It is easy to forget in a time of global economic crisis that a crisis unfolds every day for those who cannot eat well enough to stay healthy. None of us are doing enough to draw attention to the plight of hundreds of millions, whose hunger problems today cause pain for them now and for the Governments of their countries today and tomorrow.

“That is why I am proud to commit my company to this fight and to this declaration today. We must continue the R&D and innovations we are already undertaking, especially in these tough economic times. But we must also drive the oxygen of publicity into a campaign to persuade Governments, the media and wider society, mostly in the West, to look up and see the reality of life with hidden hunger for so many of our fellow human beings.”

The Chairman of the Micronutrient Forum, Professor Al Sommer from John Hopkins University, said:

“I am delighted to see the private sector is increasing its commitment to the eradication of hidden hunger. All of the scientists, nutritionists, programme delivery agencies and campaigners that make up the Forum recognise the need for all actors to play their part to address an issue that no-one can solve alone. We welcome the greater involvement of the private sector, not just in creating accessible, affordable and acceptable food products, but also in helping us draw attention to the calamity of this forgotten Millennium Goal.”

Notes to Editors

Since its creation in 2006, the Micronutrient Forum has played a role internationally as a catalyst and convener for sharing expertise, insights, and experience relevant to the control of micronutrient deficiencies and their consequences around the globe. The Forum is the successor to two scientific organizations aimed at advancing the control of vitamin A and iron deficiencies: the International Vitamin A consultative Group (IVACG) and the International Nutritional Anemia Group (INACG).

The Micronutrient Forum focuses primarily on micronutrient deficiencies of public health significance, particularly vitamin A, iron, folate, iodine and zinc. As with international IVACG and INACG meetings in the past, the Forum encourages innovation, recognizes important research findings, increases awareness of the latest data and promotes consensus and recognition of important policy implications and programs. The Forum invites leading scientists, policy makers, and programmers to present their latest research and operational findings, and facilitates dialogue among these groups on use of the available evidence in reducing deficiencies of vitamins and minerals. Participants come from academic and research institutions, international agencies, food and ingredient industries, national ministries, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and clinical and community nutrition organizations.

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