

MEDIA RELEASE

Project Launch

“Scaling up local production of fortified foods: A strategy to promote food security among women subsistence farmers in Vietnam”

Hanoi: April 5, 2016

The National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), a branch of the Vietnam Ministry of Health, and Ryerson University, Canada held an inception meeting to announce the launch of their nutrition and food security innovation project titled, “Scaling up local production of fortified foods: A strategy to promote food security among women subsistence farmers in Vietnam” at the NIN head office in Hanoi on April 5th, 2016. The project is funded by the Canadian International Food Security Fund (CIFSRF), a program of the International Development Research Centre and the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada.

The public launch opened with speeches from David Devine, Canadian Ambassador to Vietnam, the Ministry of Health in Vietnam, IDRC Regional Director for Asia, Anindya Chatterjee, as well as opening remarks from Mohamed Lachemi, president and vice-chancellor of Ryerson University which was delivered on his behalf by Dr. Cecilia Rocha, Director for the School of Nutrition at Ryerson.

Also present at the project launch were Vietnam’s Women’s Union, Officials from the People’s Committee of Lao Cai and Hai Giang and NGOs, including HealthBridge, Save the Children and UNICEF. These participants attended the inception meeting to discuss details of the project and implementation strategy.

The ultimate goal of the project is to reduce levels of food insecurity and chronic malnutrition, particularly in women and children, by tackling poverty and insufficient access to healthy foods in the northern rural provinces of Lao Cai, Lai Chau and Ha Giang. This goal will be achieved by setting up small-scale facilities that manufacture complementary fortified foods and procure crops from local women farmers. The project is estimated to reach 15,000 of the countries most malnourished children and provide counselling to 1500 mothers on infant and young child feeding practices.

The nutrient rich complementary foods will be adapted to local preferences and crop availability, and formulated utilizing the expertise of NINFOODS, a business subsidiary of NIN. NINFOODS specializes in manufacturing and distributing fortified foods, including a high-energy bar used to help treat severe acute malnutrition among children and adults, such as those living with HIV.

The final product will be distributed through a supply chain that includes public health providers, nutrition counselling centers and local commercial outlets. The research team will test this market-driven approach and develop a scale-up model that will provide a sustainable means of generating a more stable source of income for small-scale female farmers, create new jobs in the regions through operationalization of the small-scale food processing plants, contribute to improved food security, support local economic growth and reduce the reliance on imported fortified foods.

Over the last two decades the Vietnamese government successfully reduced levels of malnutrition and food insecurity from about 45% to 11% (as of 2015). They achieved such reductions by demonstrating a strong local vision, ownership and implementation of a national poverty reduction strategy. Building on these successes, the main goal of NIN, under the Ministry of Health, is to tackle the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition- poverty and insufficient access to healthy foods.

Through the project, researchers from NIN and Ryerson University will also apply their expertise and research findings to develop an evidenced-based model to inform nutrition and food security policies such as a National Nutrition Strategy for Vietnam.

Lead research partners: National Institute of Nutrition, Vietnam and Ryerson University in Canada

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