

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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African Union Commission and Nutrition International join forces to launch advocacy campaign focused on reducing malnutrition particularly in adolescent girls

Africa is home to more than 250 million adolescents, the largest cohort of young people the world has ever seen. Yet, the continent sees an estimated 60 million cases of anaemia in adolescent girls each year, which costs AU member states a staggering \$1.38B. No region, including Africa, is on track to meet its global targets of reducing anaemia in women and adolescent girls by 50%.

Against this backdrop, the Health, Humanitarian Affairs & Social Development (HHS)

Department of the African Union Commission and Nutrition International launched “With Good Nutrition, She’ll Grow Into It”, an advocacy campaign dedicated to improving the health, wellbeing and empowerment of girls in Africa through efforts to prevent iron-deficiency anaemia. The campaign was kicked off during the High-Level Dialogue on Nutrition Financing in Maseru, Lesotho, on March 24.

The two-year campaign aims to promote public awareness on the negative impacts of inadequate nutrition - especially iron-deficiency anaemia - on the health and education outcomes of adolescent girls, and galvanize the support of policymakers to prioritize investment in adolescent nutrition to scale up proven, low-cost, high-impact interventions for the prevention of iron-deficiency anaemia and improved nutrition education.

The launch event was attended by the African Union Nutrition Champion His Majesty King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho, Her Majesty Queen Masenate Mohato Seeiso of the Kingdom of Lesotho, His Excellency Sam Matekane, Prime Minister of Lesotho, and ministers and parliamentarians from various AU member states, as well as donors and other nutrition stakeholders.

Adolescent girls from Lesotho, Kenya, Tanzania and Senegal had the opportunity to speak during the launch about how anaemia and other forms of malnutrition affect them, and appealed to policy makers to make adolescent nutrition a priority.

Speaking at the launch event, Her Excellency Minata Samate Cessouma, the AU Commission’s Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, called for action advocacy for the prioritization of adolescent nutrition in AU member states, urging them to (among other things): prioritize adolescent nutrition in their programs and budgets, advocate for adolescent nutrition through the engagement of young people to reduce the prevalence of anaemia among girls, promote national policies and development plans that address iron-deficiency anaemia through multisectoral approaches, and mobilize resources for scale-up of proven low-cost, high-impact interventions for preventing iron-deficiency anaemia and improved nutrition education in adolescent girls.

“Anaemia impairs cognitive functioning, compromises school performance, reduces productivity and affects current and future reproductive health,” said Samate. “This is why it’s imperative for all AU member states to make reducing it a priority, so that adolescent girls can reach their full potential, and be active contributors to strong, prosperous African economies.”

“Investments made in adolescents and in their futures over the next decade will determine the direction of the African continent, and whether it achieves the demographic dividend these young people both promise and deserve,” said Dr. Richard Pendame, Nutrition International’s Regional Director for Africa. “As such, the benefits of optimizing nutrition in this age group are enormous and demand urgent attention.”

The AU has made ending malnutrition a priority, with the inclusion of six nutrition targets to be attained by 2025 in its [African Regional Nutrition Strategy \(2016-2025\)](#), the declaration 2022 as the Africa Year of Nutrition, and, more recently, a call for all member states to “act to end malnutrition in all its forms” made in the Abidjan Declaration.

In April 2022, African Union Commission and Nutrition International signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) toward a shared vision to end hunger poverty. Nutrition International pledged to support the AU’s Africa Year of Nutrition activities in multiple areas, among them, prioritization of adolescent nutrition in AU member states. More recently, in February 2023, Nutrition International [doubled down on its commitments](#) and pledged technical support to at least 30 AU member states. The organization also committed to supporting the development of three continental strategies over the next two years: Nutrition Communication and Advocacy, Adolescent Nutrition and Anaemia.

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