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INDIA

SUCCESS STORY

Million-Dollar Pharma Industry Investment in Diarrhea Treatment

Zinc Treatment



Peter Oylae, AED N-MARC Director in Nepal

A child receives zinc syrup to treat diarrhea.

"India is the single most critical country for diarrhea mortality. More than 500,000 children die annually from diarrhea. ... No government can create or fund the amount of zinc necessary to address this disease. It will take the manufacturers to jumpstart this process and make it sustainable over the long-term."

– Margaret Parlato, Head of AED's Global Health Population and Nutrition Group (USAID's partner)

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An initial \$150,000 in funding by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) leveraged more than \$1.2 million of investment from the pharmaceutical industry in the first year of USAID's Point-Of-Use Water Disinfection and Zinc Treatment (POUZN) project to promote the use of zinc treatment for diarrhea. POUZN enlisted the support of several pharmaceutical firms in India to develop, market, and distribute zinc tablets and syrups across the country.

In India, more than 500,000 deaths occur annually as a result of childhood diarrhea. The use of zinc, along with oral rehydration therapy (ORT), is recommended by the World Health Organization to decrease the incidence and severity of diarrhea.

Five of India's largest pharmaceutical firms – Emcure, Dr. Reddy's, Zuentus, USV, and Wallace Pharmaceuticals – invested in the effort to make zinc formulations available nationwide in India, with the goal of targeting low-income families in at-risk populations. Collaborations with civil society groups and health volunteers have helped ensure that the products reach these groups.

With more than 1.2 million doses sold in the first six months of the project – up from 19,000 a year earlier – this public-private partnership has led to the creation of a new market, with sales expected to grow steadily over the next few years.

The first phase of the project aimed to promote zinc treatment for diarrhea through health professionals by creating "zinc champions." USAID funds have helped to ensure the quality and design of marketing activities with public health messages. The pharmaceutical companies invested in promotion, product development, and distribution. More than 1,200 medical representatives from the partner companies have been trained on the benefits and promotion of the new zinc tablets and syrup in the treatment of diarrhea. The project is now targeting more than 15,500 pediatricians and 60,000 licensed general practitioners across India. In its second phase, the project will begin marketing to promote zinc treatment for diarrhea to the general public.