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# SUCCESS STORY

## Reducing Anemia in Adolescent Girls



Helen Keller International

*A girl in the Dinguiraye region of Guinea gets tested as a part of the anemia reduction program.*

Lack of iron is the most widespread micronutrient deficiency in the world, and iron-deficiency anemia is considered a serious public health problem throughout Africa. Anemia results in increased morbidity and mortality, delayed motor skill development, and reduced IQ. Pregnant and lactating women and reproductive-age girls are particularly vulnerable to iron-deficiency anemia.

In Guinea, a national anemia survey indicated that four out of five children 6 to 59 months of age were anemic, and roughly 50 percent of school-age children were anemic. Only one-quarter of the participants surveyed could name one sign of anemia, or one cause (ENAGUI 2000). As a result of this survey, the Helen Keller Institute (HKI), with funding from USAID and in collaboration with Africare, implemented a pilot program in Guinea's Dinguiraye region to reduce anemia and improve nutritional knowledge, attitudes, and practices in adolescent school girls.

Over the course of one school year, 167 girls participated in biweekly hygiene and nutritional counseling sessions (eight sessions per month). In addition, they were given daily iron folic acid supplements, 600 mg of mebendazole (for deworming) each month, and two tablespoons of red palm oil per day. Twelve teachers from the Ministry of Education implemented the program with technical assistance and supervision from HKI.

A final evaluation conducted with 80 randomly selected students indicated that:

- 20 percent of survey participants were slightly (15 percent) or moderately (5 percent) anemic at the time of the survey (half the national average).
- 87 percent of the students surveyed participated in at least one counseling session.
- 75 percent of them could accurately describe anemia.
- 50 percent of participants cited inappropriate diet as the main cause of anemia.
- Only 12.5 percent of students surveyed could not name a single cause of anemia.
- 75 percent of students described paleness as a sign of anemia, and 25 percent cited dizziness.
- Only 10 percent of students could not name one sign of anemia, and 19 percent could not name one source of iron-rich food.