

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Quality Infant Formula to Reduce Infant Malnutrition in Vietnam

The FASEVIE Programme

In Vietnam, chronic malnutrition among infants is a major problem in the poorest provinces. The lack of quality weaning foods at affordable prices is one of the main causes. The FASEVIE programme—initiated in 1994 by GRET in collaboration with the Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD) and the National Institute of Nutrition of Hanoi (NIN)—aims to improve the nutritional situation of very young children. It combines the creation of production and commercialisation channels for quality weaning formulas available to all and nutrition education. The programme is implemented in partnership with local health, nutrition, and population education stakeholders.

CONTEXT AND GOALS

Despite the country's rapid economic development, some Vietnamese provinces (the Central, Northern high plateaux, and south-central provinces) remain very poor. In these regions, infant malnutrition is chronic. Studies undertaken by GRET, IRD, and NIN reveal that the nutritional situation of very young children deteriorates considerably starting from the age of 6 months (when weaning begins). Introducing supplementary foods too early and insufficient use of special transitional foods (mush)—too expensive for the poorest—partially explain this deterioration.

Faced with these observations, the FASEVIE programme was implemented with three aims:

- make good quality, affordable infant formulas available to households;
- educate mothers (notably encouraging exclusive maternal breastfeeding until the age of six months); and
- contribute to designing effective tools for a national programme to reduce infant malnutrition.

From the start, the programme worked with local food-processing enterprises, thus contributing to the economic development of the country.

APPROACH AND ACTIVITIES

The following activities were undertaken during a three-year experimental phase (1997-1999): testing infant formulas and fabrication procedures suited to the Vietnamese context; identifying enterprises likely to produce these formulas; launching initial production; commercialising the products; and setting up a nutrition education programme for the populations.

Since 2000, the FASEVIE programme has been concentrating on consolidating its activities through:

- nutrition education campaigns for populations, in relation with the Vietnam Women's Union and health care centres;
- creation of a sustainable market of consumers through commercial promotion and marketing of the products;
- stabilisation of production enterprises in the context of a com- ●●●

Current Budget

966,140
over three years

Donors

Côtes-d'Armor
General Council,
Nord-Pas-de-Calais
Regional Council,
Ministry of Foreign
Affairs,
the French UNICEF
Committee, Sight
& Life Foundation,
Hoffmann La
Roche Group,
Société Gréville

petitive market economy in the centre of the country (a production unit in the North is planned to open in 2002);

- transfer of expertise to Vietnamese institutions with an aim toward national expansion of the approach; and
- development of local product supply chains (especially soy beans).

A fifteen-person team (GRET, IRD, NIN, and the Women's Union) spread out over four sites (headquarters in Hanoi) works for the programme full-time. It works in partnership with various Vietnamese stakeholders:

- public health and nutrition organisations (NIN, preventive medicine services);
- the Women's Union;
- provincial People's Committees;
- enterprises that produce and sell infant foods; and
- the national Institute of Agricultural Science.

CURRENT RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

A Range of Infant Foods Produced Locally

Two types of infant foods that respect international recommendations are currently being produced and sold:

- Favilo and Favina, complete instant formulas made from local products (rice, soy, sesame);
- Favilase, a food supplement to add to the traditional dish.

This programme put in-depth research behind these products' design. An innovative extrusion cooking procedure guarantees very low production costs.

The Market Exists

In conformity with the initial objectives, the products are sold at affordable prices for the largest number: the products for new-borns cost two to six times less than other locally produced infant formulas, and seven to ten times less than imported formulas.

Commercial advertising has been done: sample distribution, posters, TV ads, etc. Among other things, the messages addressed to mothers are based on nutrition (nutrition education).

The products are sold by grocery stores, health centres, and the Women's Union. They are also used by international organisations (World Food Programme, Plan International, etc.) in their distribution campaigns.

Three Local Enterprises Are Operational

One enterprise was created in the framework of the project, and two others received support diversifying their activities. Their staffs have received full technical and marketing training. A total of thirty jobs have been created.

Towards National Expansion of the Programme

A series of impact assessments has been launched. Planned to last two years, they will serve to assess the programme before national expansion.

Since August 2001, the FASEVIE programme has been registered with the Vietnam Ministry of Health's national nutrition plan of action for 2001-2005.