

STORY

Soluble micronutrients are changing the lives of thousands of children in Ventanilla



Ventanilla, a marginal urban districts located northeast of Lima, shelters approximately 280,000 inhabitants, 8 urbanizations and more than 300 human settlements in its 73.52 km reach. One of the most populated areas is Pachacutec. Here, between the sandy hills and makeshift dwellings, lives Marcelito Cardenas, a child of almost 4 years of age.

Before he was 2 he was diagnosed with anaemia and immediately agreed to treatment with *sprinkles*. Today he can boast of joy and inexhaustible energy. The 10.5 grams of blood haemoglobin confirmed suspicion of his nutritional deficiency however; this did not surprise doctors at the health centre where 60% of all children in Ventanilla below the age of 2 are anaemic.

His mother, Celestina Timoteo, tells us that before he began consuming the micronutrients he looked pale and weak, slept often and had no appetite. The boy, whom she follows with a loving gaze as they wait to pass his regular weight and height examination in the health centre, is now talkative, curious and restless.

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At the end of the medical check-up we accompany mother and child home where we are witness to how much Marcelito enjoys the delicious plate of lentils with egg tortilla which Celestina has prepared. “Don’t forget to add the sprinkles,” reminds Celestina, ensuring that anaemia does not return to their household and that 12.6 grams of blood haemoglobin does not decline or reverse his flushed cheeks and vivacious gaze.

While Marcelito eats, his mother tells us about nourishing meals such as ‘sangrecita’, liver stew, fried fish and lentils she prepares for him. She cannot conceal the pleasure of seeing Marcelito healthy, “my son willingly eats his meals with micronutrients because they don’t change the flavour of his food. Now he can spend all day running, jumping and talking to everyone,” says Celestina with notable pride.

Along with other mothers whose children receive soluble micronutrients Celestina attends nutrition and health discussions and is motivated by the personnel and health promoters to comply and ensure the success of the treatment delivered by UNICEF.

Ventanilla is a clear example that poverty and child malnourishment has gradually established itself in urban zones and how the amount of poor and malnourished population has increased more rapidly in urban settings than rural environments.

Since August 2009, UNICEF supports the initiative of the Municipality of Ventanilla which is benefiting more than 18,000 children below the age of 3. Moreover, UNICEF’s collaborative support with the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations and Ministry of Health has helped nutritional sprinkles reach 100,000 children below the age of 3 and reduce the incidence of anaemia in Apurimac, Ayachucho and Huancavelica.

Since the last 2011 trimester the effort has extended to 13 additional regions of the country which will benefit approximately 400,000 children.

As minutes pass we observe the enthusiasm with which Marcelito eats his lunch. Contemplating the balanced meal his mother has prepared we are confident that, despite the limitations of living Pachacutec, Marcelito is free from premature death, impaired vision, delayed growth from malnutrition and a hindered intelligence quotient.

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Satiated, Marcelito gladly finishes his drink and reposes for some time before going in search for his ball. Celestina recognizes that, like every afternoon, it is playtime for her restless son.

It's time we return from the outskirts of town to the city centre. As we drive away we see a perfect scene: a child running to the arms of his mother, a boy that has won the battle against anaemia and that, thanks to the superpowers of micronutrients, and love of his family can develop healthily, strong and happy.

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