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“Fortify West Africa” MOU Delivered Between Economic Community of West African States and Helen Keller International

Agreement Marks Milestone In Strengthening Movement Toward Fortification of Staple Foods in West Africa In the Fight Against Malnutrition

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Dakar, SENEGAL – 31st July, 2013. On his final day with Helen Keller International (HKI), as he transitions to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Shawn Baker and the President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Kadre Desire Ouedraogo, appended their signatures to a joint memorandum of understanding to demonstrate the commitment of their institutions to sustainable access to vitamins and minerals through fortified food in all 15 countries of West Africa.

“I cannot tell you how pleased I am that one of my final signatures as an HKI team member has been on this Memorandum of Understanding between the ECOWAS and HKI for food fortification,” stated Shawn K. Baker, Former Vice President and Regional Director for Africa on the morning the agreement was delivered.

This marks a major milestone in combatting micronutrient deficiencies and achieving sustainable food fortification in West Africa. On July 31, 2013, Baker appeared on the regional continental television channel Africable to discuss the significance of the agreement. He noted that over 45% of children die annually from malnutrition related complications and in West Africa deficiencies in vitamins and minerals continue to derail development efforts. The President of the ECOWAS Commission offered his appreciation and assurance that his team would successfully implement the terms of the MOU.

Since 2007, Helen Keller International has worked with the West African Health Organization and the West Africa Economic Monetary Union (UEMOA) to fortify vegetable oil with vitamin A and wheat flour with iron, zinc, folic acid and other B-group vitamins in West Africa under the “Fortify West Africa” initiative. These efforts have been made possible through support from the United State Agency for International Development and other technical and financial partners including UNICEF, Micronutrient Initiative, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, Smarter Futures/Flour Fortification Initiative, BASF, Bioanalyt, DSM, Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, and the Government of Taiwan, as well as industry associations such as the Association of Milling Industries and the Association of Vegetable Oil Industries of UEMOA.



Eleven countries now have mandatory legislation for fortifying wheat flour with 10 out of 15 countries legislating mandatory vitamin A fortification of vegetable oil. The new MOU between ECOWAS and HKI is principally aimed at developing harmonized ECOWAS-wide regulatory framework that will facilitate intra-regional trade with 70% of the overall population of West Africa having continued access to fortified food with required levels of micronutrients on a daily basis. It will significantly contribute to reducing and controlling deficiencies in micronutrients and socio-economic developments.

Founded in 1915 by Helen Keller and George Kessler, the mission of Helen Keller International (HKI) is to save the sight and lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. HKI combats the causes and consequences of blindness and malnutrition by establishing programs based on evidence and research in vision, health and nutrition. Headquartered in New York City, HKI's programs prevent blindness and reduce malnutrition in 21 countries in Africa and Asia, as well as in the United States.