

Banda Ndiaye

Sahelian countries



In the early 1990s, Banda was working on child survival programs at the community level in Senegal. As he gained more experience working on health issues in communities, he recognized that along with most health problems, malnutrition was also an underlying issue. He realized that it would be difficult to improve health status without seriously addressing malnutrition. The situation was so commonplace and yet, community leaders did not even discuss it. Banda started focusing on nutrition and implemented Senegal's first micronutrient program while at World Vision. He became passionate about the issue, and since then, has focused his career on nutrition in Senegal and throughout West Africa.

"No single person has shown more faithfulness and commitment towards giving more recognition to the concept of NUTRITION than Banda," said one of his nominators.

It was an uphill climb, and it took a lot of perservance. In his early days establishing micronutrient programs, Banda realized that he needed to bring credible evidence to policymakers in order to get them to support programs – and it was this realization that led to the successful introduction of a vitamin A supplementation program in 1997. Banda creatively sought solutions to other potential roadblocks, including funding challenges. Rather than waiting for the \$8 million that was estimated to implement a food fortification program, Banda instead started with less than \$100,000 in seed money, first engaging with the private sector encouraging voluntary programs, then working with the Ministry of Trade on formulating standards.

While at World Vision, Banda mobilized university professors and NGOs around the concept of "No Hungry Children" and by doing so enriched the lives of millions of children and mothers who would drive hundreds of kilometers per day just to visit his nutrition solidarity groups. Banda also single-handedly dreamt of, advocated for and finally succeeded in having the National Micronutrient day established in Senegal. Banda piloted innovative strategies that continue to be practiced extensively today by public health practitioners across West Africa to enhance the sustainability of community-based health and nutrition management systems.

Banda became the Micronutrient Initiative's Sahel Director in 2007. He recognized that helping governments formulate evidence-based policies and strengthening their leadership and implementation of them creates sustainable

change. He channeled resources to governments in Mali, Niger, Senegal and Burkina Faso and helped them transition from expensive vitamin A supplementation (VAS) campaigns to integrating VAS into routine services and budgeting. He successfully advocated to Economic Community Of West African States to adopt resolutions for VAS and oil and wheat flour fortification for its 15 member states.

In Senegal, he facilitated creating fortification standards and helped industries upgrade equipment, leading producers to fortify oil with vitamin A. He creatively helped small salt producers establish sustainable iodate procurement systems, encouraged salt cooperative formation, and introduced Canadian volunteers to increase machine use capacity and maintenance and consultants to help producers develop business plans for bank loans and microfinance. This had a multiplier effect in Senegal's regional salt exporter role. He supports Burkina Faso by strengthening its import controls, further motivating exporters to iodize. With UNICEF, he helped the West African Economic and Monetary Union harmonize iodine content in salt in its eight member states, facilitating greater, safer regional access.

He ensured the Senegalese and Burkina Faso governments' commitment to the Zinc Alliance for Child Health (ZACH) public/private partnership to increase zinc and Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) for diarrhea treatment in young children. He oversees a Burkina Faso program to reduce stunting by building community capacity to prevent severe and acute malnutrition. And in Senegal and Niger, he oversees revitalization of Iron and Folic Acid supplementation programs for pregnant women and undertakes research to improve community-based maternal and neonatal health through micronutrient interventions.

"Commitment, passion, listening to what communities need and always seeking knowledge and innovation" are the keys to his success, says Banda. He has his sights set on his next big challenge: elevating nutrition onto the political agenda in the Sahel region by creating demand and mobilizing stakeholders and civil society, advocating to government to deliver better nutrition services more efficiently.