

SAVING  
LIVES  
CHANGING  
LIVES



## Food Fortification

Adding vitamins or minerals to commonly eaten foods – food fortification – has the potential to make a big impact on micronutrient deficiencies.

Fortification has already played a major part in improving public health over the past century, but with 2 billion people across the world still suffering from ‘hidden hunger’, we need to take this further.

### WHAT IS FOOD FORTIFICATION?

Fortification involves adding micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) to foods, with little effect on taste and cooking properties. Staple foods and condiments are normally used as a vehicle for fortification as they are consumed by the majority of the population.

### HIDDEN HUNGER

Micronutrient deficiencies are a form of malnutrition often unnoticeable to the naked eye as the people they affect frequently don't show any clinical symptoms.

While micronutrient deficiencies may be invisible, their impact is far from it. Iodine deficiency is the world's most prevalent cause of preventable brain damage, iron deficiency increases the risk of death in childbirth, and vitamin A deficiency causes night blindness which today affects millions of children and pregnant women.

Hidden hunger has long-lasting and devastating consequences. Children are unable to learn and reach their full potential, adults are less productive, and household poverty is exacerbated, trapping communities into a vicious cycle of poverty and poor health.

Today 2 billion people across the world suffer from micronutrient deficiencies, many because they do not have access to nutritious diets.

Food fortification therefore provides a solution.

WFP is increasingly sourcing fortified foods for our food distributions and programmes. We also advocate for fortification in policy and play a facilitating role in countries, connecting key actors.

## WHY FORTIFY?

- Fortification works. Countries in North America and Europe have been fortifying foods since the 1920s, which has led to the virtual eradication of deficiency-related diseases like goiter, rickets, beriberi and pellagra in these countries. In the 1990s salt iodization was scaled up around the world and saw the number of countries with iodine deficiencies drop from 110 in 1993 to 25 in 2015.
- Micronutrients can be added to already commonly eaten foods so fortification doesn't require people to change their eating habits—a complex process requiring significant time and investment.
- Fortification is a cost-effective strategy because it can piggyback on already existing distribution channels and initiatives such as school meals and social safety nets. In this way it doesn't divert significant resources away from other efforts, and can be delivered alongside complementary programmes to address consumer awareness, behavior change and the underlying causes of malnutrition.



## WFP AND FORTIFICATION

Since 2004 food fortification has been on WFP's agenda. We source and provide fortified foods, such as cereals, oils and salt, for our programmes and food distributions. We also play a facilitating role in countries, connecting and supporting governments and private sector actors to fortify staple foods locally, as well as advocating for fortification in national and international policy.

## FORTIFICATION 2.0: RICE

Until now, one staple has been largely neglected in global fortification efforts: rice. Rice is a staple for half the world's population, and can contribute up to 70 percent of daily energy intake, particularly in developing countries. Places where rice is an important contributor to the diet often happen to overlap with areas where micronutrient deficiencies are most common. Here lies an enormous opportunity: Fortifying rice has great potential to help fight hidden hunger on a large scale.

WFP currently distributes 300,000 metric tonnes of rice through its programmes, but only 2 percent of this is fortified. With our extensive rice distribution and presence in countries where micronutrient deficiencies are most prevalent, WFP has a golden opportunity to improve the health and nutrition of millions.

In fact, rice fortification is fast becoming a key area of our focus. In India—where three-quarters of women and children are micronutrient-deficient [1]—we have been working with the government to provide fortified rice to children in school meals and to 800 million people through a government safety net programme. Meanwhile in Bangladesh, in partnership with the government and private sector actors, we have established a fortified rice supply chain with distribution through government safety nets and through the garment sector's corporate social responsibility programmes.

## THE WAY FORWARD

To have a significant impact on micronutrient deficiencies, fortification must involve a number of actors and partners, from governments to nongovernmental organizations, advocacy groups and the private sector. WFP will continue to work with all of these groups in a joint effort to improve nutrition.

While fortification isn't a silver bullet, it's one effective tool in fighting micronutrient deficiencies and can therefore play a valuable role on the path to zero hunger.

### References:

[1] Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, 2018, [www.gainhealth.org/knowledge-centre/country/india](http://www.gainhealth.org/knowledge-centre/country/india)

Photo page 1: WFP/Saikat Mojumder