

THE RIGHT, SMART & SUSTAINABLE CHOICE – STEPPING UP EFFORTS TOWARDS EFFECTIVE FOOD FORTIFICATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One in three people in the world today suffer from malnutrition

“Few challenges facing the global community today match the scale of malnutrition, a condition that directly affects one in three people”ⁱ. Central to this are the more than two billion people who suffer from micronutrient deficiency which reduces cognitive development, increases maternal and infant mortality and impacts health and productivity, all of which undermine economic growth and efforts to end global poverty.

Time is ripe for Action!

Yet the time to redouble efforts to tackle malnutrition has never been so right, underpinned by the UN Sustainable Development Goal (no.2) committing to “ending all forms of malnutrition by 2030” and further reinforced by the declaration of 2016-2025 as the International Decade for Action on Nutrition.



A high impact cost-effective solution exists



Photo Credit: GAIN

Food fortification with micronutrients is ranked among the top three international development priorities (Copenhagen Consensus) as one of the most feasible, cost-effective, and sustainable evidence-based interventions. The East Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC) have made significant strides over the last decade in **adopting** food fortification. However, monitoring, legislation enforcement, inter-country information-sharing, and sustained investment limitations persist. These weaken the enabling environment required for food fortification to thrive and contribute to economic growth, healthier citizens, and boosting children’s school performance.

CALL TO ACTION – Key Recommendations

Addressing these challenges is not only a moral imperative but also the smart and sustainable choice for governments to reap the financial, health and education benefits linked to functioning, carefully monitored and scaled-up fortification programmes. We urge ECSA-HC member governments to:

- **STRENGTHEN CAPACITIES** of agencies responsible for inspection and enforcement of fortification programs
- **ENFORCE LEGISLATION & STANDARDS** and systematically adopt regional harmonized guidelines and tools for monitoring fortified and nutritious foods
- **MONITOR REGULARLY** in terms of industry compliance **but also** the actual consumption and impact of food fortification programs
- **IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE SHARING** of food fortification information across countries and make better use of this knowledge to inform more effective nutrition education programmes
- **INCREASE INVESTMENTS**, within national budget allocations, for food fortification monitoring, capacity building, knowledge management and enforcement of legislation and standards

THE ISSUE: THE DEVASTATING IMPACT AND COST OF HIDDEN HUNGER

Malnutrition and poor diets constitute the **number-one driver of the global burden of disease**. **More than two billion people** suffer from micronutrient deficiency – micronutrients that are **essential to the mental and physical development of both children and adults**ⁱ. This hidden hunger reduces cognitive development, increases maternal and infant mortality and impacts health, productivity, and economic growth. It is an **underlying cause of 45 per cents of all deaths among children under five**ⁱⁱ. Despite the fact that hidden hunger not only impacts on health but also comes at a high economic price, there is still too little attention and resources allocated by governments and development partners to significantly address this critical issue.



Photo Credit: GAIN

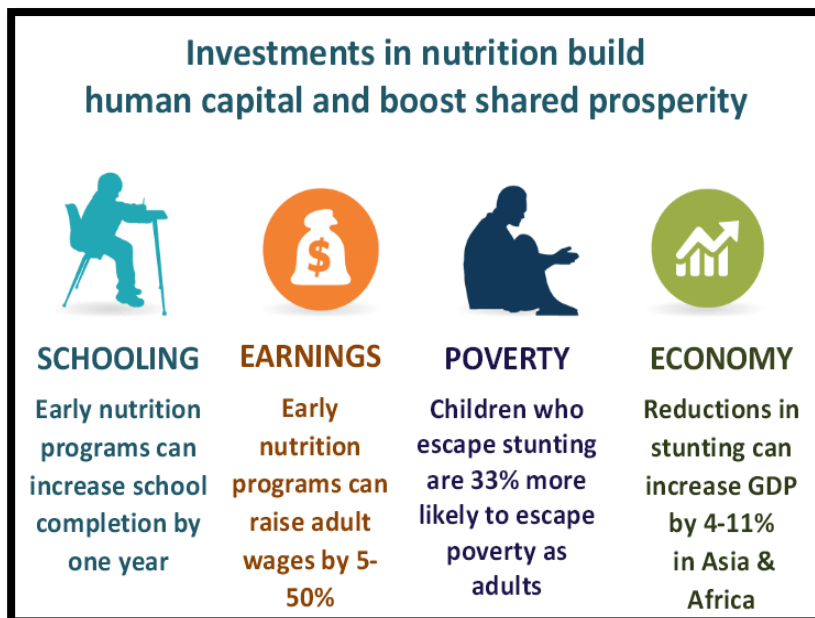
TIME TO ACT!

Yet the stage is set for turning this situation around, bolstered by the **new ambitious targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**, challenging the world to think and act differently. At least 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals contain indicators that are highly relevant for nutrition, reflecting **nutrition's central role in sustainable development**ⁱⁱⁱ.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
2.1 by 2030 end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

Given the **scale of the malnutrition problem**, current spending designed to overcome it is too low. Analysis shows that 24 low- and middle-income governments allocate just 2.1 percent of their spending to reducing undernutrition, whereas they spend a total of more than 30 percent on agriculture, education, health, and social protectionⁱ. And yet, there is strong and growing consensus that improving nutrition is one of the best investments a country can make in its future prosperity. According to recent estimates, \$1 invested in stunting reduction generates about \$18 in economic returns^{iv}. Conversely, we also know that the annual GDP losses from low weight, poor child growth, and micronutrient deficiencies average 11 percent in Asia and Africa—greater than the loss experienced during the 2008–2010 financial crisisⁱ.




Source: Meeting the Global Goals for Malnutrition: How Much Will It Cost, and Who Will Pay? World Bank, July 2015

THE SOLUTION: FOOD FORTIFICATION – ONE OF THE MOST FEASIBLE, COST-EFFECTIVE, AND SUSTAINABLE EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Food Fortification – A top international development priority and cost-effective strategy

At the Copenhagen Consensus 2008, the Expert Panel ranked fortification with micronutrients, among the top three international development priorities. It described the technology for fortifying food with micronutrients as simple, economical, and one of the most cost-effective strategies to control micronutrient deficiencies, improve nutrition, and promote economic development

FOOD FORTIFICATION DEFINED

Food fortification is the addition of key vitamin and minerals (e.g. iron, folic acid, iodine, vitamin A, and zinc) to staple foods to improve their nutritional content and address a nutritional gap in a population. The foods most commonly fortified are salt, wheat, corn, rice, bouillon cubes, soya sauce and other condiments (source: Project Healthy Child .

Why Food Fortification? Key Characteristics

Food fortification alone will not end malnutrition but it is an indispensable public health intervention that should form part of national nutrition plans.

- **COST EFFECTIVE:** Studies demonstrate that fortification is not only cost effective (i.e. is a cheaper way to increase micronutrient intake compared with other interventions with the same aim), but also has a high cost–benefit ratio (i.e. is a good investment). The cost of fortification per person is only a few cents per year making it one of the least expensive and yet most effective actions^v.
- **IMPLEMENTED AT SCALE:** Food fortification can operate on a massive scale as it can be implemented by the food industry and reach large numbers of consumers through retail. Moreover, it is particularly effective in tackling deficiencies in densely populated urban areas.
- **SIMPLE:** Food fortification is particularly attractive because it improves the micronutrient intake of existing diets without requiring target groups to change their diet, and uses existing technology and processes when the right industry landscape exists.

The multifaceted benefits of Food Fortification

Big boost to the economy: Food fortification helps economies by reducing malnutrition and the burden of health care costs, preventing estimated losses to the economy of up to 2.65% of GDP (World Bank).

Healthier population: Food fortification can significantly improve the health of all age groups in a population – specifically in helping to reduce child and maternal mortality (iron deficiency anaemia among pregnant women causes more than 20% of maternal mortality in sub-Saharan Africa)^{vi}.

Increased school performance: Studies confirm children with adequate iron status have improved cognitive abilities, perform better in school, and hence the potential for higher lifetime income^{vi}.

Effective humanitarian response: In situations of fragility, diet is often inadequate and imbalanced, making the availability of fortified foods prior to an emergency a particularly useful mechanism to build nutritional resilience and reduce the severity of malnutrition^{vii}.

Current barriers affecting Food Fortification, particularly in the ECSA Region

Despite the significant benefits of food fortification, several key factors are affecting its impact and therefore need to be overcome for food fortification initiatives to maximise its full potential.

1. Limited technical capacity for monitoring the impact of food fortification programs
2. Challenges in enforcement of fortification standards and regulations
3. Absence of standards and guidelines for monitoring specialized nutritious products
4. Limited analytical capability and capacity of government laboratories on fortified products
5. Inadequate monitoring of industry compliance to standards (quality assurance/quality control)
6. Limited knowledge management and information-sharing on food fortification across countries

CALL TO ACTION: CREATING A STRONG ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Moving the food fortification agenda forward

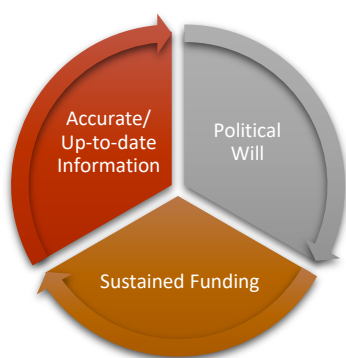
Significant progress in food fortification has been achieved throughout Africa - more than 70% of the population of African countries with mandatory fortification legislation is now estimated to be regularly consuming at least one fortified food staple daily^{viii}. The East Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC) has played a catalytic role in moving the fortification agenda forward in Africa. Among other achievements, it has developed monitoring manuals and has worked with the East African Community to harmonize regional standards for fortified wheat and maize flours, vegetable oil, salt, and sugar. The time is ripe for consolidating these gains in the region, spurred globally by the SDGs and the naming of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025), and regionally by the 2015 Arusha Statement on Food Fortification.

A POLITICAL CHOICE

Ending malnutrition is ultimately a political choice [...] we need to start seeing nutrition investments as a means to economic growth rather than seeing better nutrition as a result of economic growth.

Global Nutrition Report 2016

Creating an effective and sustainable enabling environment



Setting up and sustaining an integrated, effectively functioning fortification program is a complex undertaking that requires the engagement of ministries of health and commerce, food safety and regulatory bodies, customs and border control agencies, the private sector, international development organizations, donors, and civil society. In this brief, the focus is on the key roles and responsibilities of governments in creating and sustaining an enabling environment that allows food fortification to thrive and maximise its potential in contributing to eradicating malnutrition. Creating an enabling environment requires three key inputs without which food fortification cannot operate and function to maximum capacity (See Figure to the left).

Key recommendations

Based on these key pre-requisites, below are the practical policy recommendations governments **should** prioritise to reinforce food fortification programmes' contribution to eradicating malnutrition and boosting economic growth.

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING: Ministries of Health and Industry/Trade **should** prioritise strengthening the capacity of agencies responsible for inspection and enforcement of fortification programs

LEGISLATION, GUIDELINES & STANDARDS: Government agencies and regulatory bodies **should** consistently enforce existing legislation, promulgate new smart policies and systematically adopt regional harmonized guidelines and tools for monitoring fortified and nutritious foods

REGULAR MONITORING: Government agencies and regulatory bodies **should** prioritise monitoring efforts both in terms of industry compliance and in relation to the actual consumption and impact of food fortification programs

KNOWLEDGE & INFORMATION: Ministries of Health, Education and Industry **should** strengthen mechanisms for inter-country sharing of food fortification information and data, while making better use of this knowledge to inform more effective nutrition education programmes

INVESTMENTS AND FUNDING: Ministries of Finance and relevant line Ministries **should** increase allocations within national and sub-national budget lines towards food fortification monitoring, capacity building and knowledge management activities, and enforcement of legislation and standards

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ⁱ **Global Nutrition Report 2016** - From promise to impact: Ending Malnutrition by 2030, IFPRI

ⁱⁱ **Micronutrients Initiative** – Evidence Generation and Policy - Fortification Programme

ⁱⁱⁱ **Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN)** – Nutrition and the Sustainable Development Goals (2016)

^{iv} **The economic rationale for investing in nutrition** - Hoddinott, Alderman, Behrman, Haddad, & Horton (2013)

^v **Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition** – Large Scale Food Fortification

^{vi} **Micronutrient Fortification (Iron/Salt Iodization)** - Copenhagen Consensus, Horton, Mannar & Wesley (2008)

^{vii} **Supplementation, Food Fortification & Dietary Diversification** - BMZ (May 2012)

^{viii} **Food Fortification in Africa Progress to date and priorities moving forward** - Sight and Life (2013)