

Rice Fortification

A paradigm shift in global micronutrient deficiencies?

Rice is a staple food for three billion people, mostly living in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) where micronutrient deficiencies (MND) are widespread. The World Food Programme (WFP), DSM and Micronutrient Initiative (MI) organized a Rice Fortification Symposium at the 2016 Micronutrient Forum in Cancun, Mexico. The objective was ambitious: to rally global partners and create a movement that will deliver a global roadmap for scaling up rice fortification.

The meeting was well attended, with key technical experts and senior managers from leading development/humanitarian, private-sector and donor entities such as WFP, FFI, MI, GAIN, UNICEF, PATH, DSM, WRIGHT GROUP and BMGF. WFP launched a short film on rice fortification with a historical perspective of staple food fortification ([available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWklss9dTvo&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWklss9dTvo&feature=youtu.be)).

The symposium constituted another important step toward aligning stakeholders in their role to scale up rice fortification globally.

As Fokko Wientjes (DSM) pointed out, staple food fortification, including the fortification of rice, is one of several interventions that support reduction of MND, and needs to be implemented within a package of nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific actions. The decision as to which staple food(s) should be fortified depends on various factors, such as identification of the staple foods most commonly consumed by specific vulnerable populations.

“WFP is working on fortifying the rice that is included in its food basket, thereby fueling demand for fortified rice at the global level. While this is a complicated process that will take time, the drive is there to make it happen.”

Lauren Landis, Director Nutrition Division, WFP

A compelling case on how to trigger investments across the rice value-chain must be made through multisectoral and multistakeholder consensus, along with an assessment of cost effectiveness. Scott Montgomery, Executive Director of FFI, questioned whether the demand for, or the supply of, fortified rice should come first. He also questioned how the up-front costs to kick-start rice fortification could be covered, since the private sector requires a critical mass to invest in the production of fortified kernels and create viable commercial market opportunities. The consensus was that both “push” and “pull” strategies are necessary.

“The policy advocacy piece is missing from the rice fortification agenda. We need to communicate with the governments’ policy-makers – and establish how much the scale-up of rice fortification will cost, what they will get from it, and who’s going to pay for it. The dialogue needs to be simple and not confusing.”

Joel Spicer, President, Micronutrient Initiative

The importance of fortifying humanitarian aid rice, including the rice in WFP’s food basket, as well as rice distributed through social safety nets, was emphasized during the discussion. In addition, the case was made for focusing on rice fortification in West Africa, as about one third of global trade occurs between Asia and West Africa, where MND remain widespread. This rather consolidated supply chain offers additional opportunities for significant increases in volumes of fortified rice, making it possible to reach the critical mass needed to trigger the necessary private-sector investment.



Rice fortification has the potential to fill an important gap in the current food fortification landscape

Stakeholder representatives agreed that existing coordination spaces should be utilized to facilitate strong regional and global coordination. This would enable the sharing of knowledge and the learning of lessons among countries and regions.

During her closing remarks, Lauren Landis, Nutrition Director for WFP, echoed on her turn the call for global coordination, alignment on key areas, and partnerships to work for recognition of the positive public health impact of fortified rice. She pledged that WFP would take the lead in following up with partners on next steps.

Key ideas emanating from the symposium

- › Rice fortification can fill an important gap in the current food fortification landscape, especially in countries where rice is a dominant staple among the population.

- › A compelling case for how to trigger investment across the rice value-chain must be made, along with an assessment of cost-effectiveness. Opportunities for large-scale sustainable rice fortification include humanitarian food aid, national food-based social safety nets, and the Asia-West Africa rice trade.
- › Leadership and coordination is lacking globally, and there is a need for a strong multisectoral and multistakeholder coalition to steer the scaling-up of rice fortification.
- › A comprehensive action plan to scale up rice fortification is necessary in order to enable multiple partners to align and coordinate their efforts.