



## Flour Fortification Workshop for Millers - REPORT

27 February 2022 - Cairo, Egypt

Sofitel Cairo Gezirah Hotel

***The Flour Fortification Workshop for Millers was possible thanks to the support of Food Fortification Initiative (FFI) and its partners: Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade-Egypt (MOSIT), International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and UNICEF.***

### BACKGROUND

In 2008, the Government of Egypt started a program to fortify the wheat flour used in subsidized baladi bread, a staple food consumed by a majority of Egypt's low-income population. Through this program, life-saving amounts of folic acid and iron reached approximately 50 million Egyptians. The program ended in 2011/2012 due to circumstances external to the project. Despite the halt in the project, the Government of Egypt has remained supportive of fortification.

Fortification of flour with iron and folic acid is an ideal intervention as Egypt consumes approximately 17 million tons of wheat per year, making it one of the largest consumers worldwide. Since bread is Egypt's main staple food and is consumed by the majority of the population, fortification of baladi bread through the subsidy system and on the open market with iron and folic acid is an effective strategy to address two pressing public health problems: anemia and neural tube defects (NTDs).

Flour fortification with iron can significantly reduce levels of anemia in Egypt. According to the latest Demographic and Health Survey, over 20% of women and 27% of children under five are considered anemic. Fortification with folic acid can also reduce the prevalence of NTDs, which is three times higher than the global average. Mandatory fortification of flour available through Egypt's social safety net system and the open market will enable 90% of the Egyptian



population—approximately 90 million people—to receive the vitamins and minerals they need to lead a more productive and healthier life.

In October 2018, the government launched *100 Million Healthy Lives*, an initiative that proposes solutions to address key chronic health issues in Egypt including malnutrition. The government sought FFI's expertise in 2019 to restart Egypt's fortified baladi bread subsidy program and expand wheat flour fortification to the open market to address key health challenges such as anemia and NTDs.

FFI and its partners have provided technical support in Egypt since April 2019 through the following activities:

- Mapping the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead for flour fortification,
- Providing evidence-based recommendations for appropriate market channels to reach target populations,
- Drafting an implementation plan with the timeframe for a successful program,
- Conducting a comprehensive mill assessment that entailed a detailed outline of mill readiness to launch fortification,
- Developing a high-level advocacy documentary to showcase the significance of fortification as an intervention for improving the health and wellbeing of Egyptians, and
- Hosting flour fortification workshops for millers to refresh and build capacity among millers for the flour fortification launch.

On 1 April 2021, FFI, its partners, and MOSIT hosted a flour fortification workshop for millers. The workshop created momentum and led to an exchange of ideas and discussion among MOSIT, the Egypt Ministry of Health (MOH), and other key stakeholders. At the workshop, stakeholders decided there would need to be joint action between the two Ministers/Ministries to make flour fortification a priority for the Egyptian Government and Cabinet. As a result, a concept note was developed jointly by FFI and UNICEF and submitted to MOH and MOSIT. The concept note was well received by both Ministries. From this point onwards, stakeholders worked together to form a concrete plan for implementation for flour fortification. FFI and its partners played a critical role as the catalyst, changemaker, and initiator of change for this project to move forward.

As a result of the success of the April 2021 workshop, FFI, partners, and MOSIT planned to host more workshops that could reach millers across the country and help prepare for an imminent launch of flour fortification. These workshops were to take place in five locations across Egypt to allow the maximum number of trainees to attend. The locations identified were Cairo, Alexandria, Tanta, Menya, and Sohag. However due to circumstances external to FFI efforts, it was decided to conduct only the Cairo workshop and not continue to the four remaining locations.



## PARTICIPANTS

**Chambers:** American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM)

**Embassies:** Ambassador of Argentina and representation from Embassy of Ireland

**Food Holding Company:** CEO and team members

**Harvard University:** A team of neurosurgeons from Harvard University (Neurokidz project)

**International Agencies:** GAIN, IF, UNICEF (representative from Nutrition Unit), USAID, WHO (Regional Advisor in Nutrition for WHO/EMRO and team; WHO-Egypt representative)

**Millers:** Wide representation from across the country of millers from the private and public sector. A sampling of the governorates represented include Cairo, Alexandria, Behera, Qena, Gharbia, Luxor, Menoufia, Ismailia, and Sharqia

**Ministry of Health:** Minister's advisors and assistants

**MOSIT:** Minister's advisors and assistants

**National Food Safety Authority:** CEO's Deputy and team members

**National Nutrition Institute:** Team members with experience in milling and food fortification

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Takatuf (leading NGO in Egypt for child health and education)

## OBJECTIVES

The Flour Fortification Workshop for Millers held on 27 February 2022 had two main objectives.

- 1) Update and refresh miller knowledge on flour fortification.
- 2) Connect millers from the private and public sectors with key fortification stakeholders to jointly discuss next steps for flour fortification.



## WORKSHOP FORMAT

The workshop brought together a full spectrum of stakeholders from private and public sectors, non-governmental organizations, millers, and potential donors, many of whom were meeting for the first time in person. The event was successful in achieving the objectives, and more invitees joined than expected—it was full house. The workshop not only brought together a large number of stakeholders but also managed to bring in new stakeholders, new interest, and new understanding for the significance of fortification.

The workshop's format actively engaged participants and created a dynamic day full of interest, participation, and energy. The workshop employed several methods to communicate with and empower participants:

- 1) **Training modules:** Modules developed by FFI, GAIN, and Kansas State University (KSU) were translated and dubbed into Arabic to suit the audience's language preference.
- 2) **Presentations:** Presentations were given either in person or through video to provide a broad sampling of stakeholders' areas of expertise, insights, and personal experiences.
- 3) **Quiz and Competition:** A quiz was held after each of the modules to test the overall participant knowledge. The responses were submitted to the moderators, where the results were shared and the winners announced. This process generated discussion and engagement and entertainment among participants.
- 4) **Certificates of Achievement:** Each of the participants received a Certificate of Achievement that recognized his/her effort at the workshop and certified successful completion of the program.
- 5) **Giveaways:** Participants received a giveaway bag that included a branded note pad, a pen, a USB port containing the presentations and modules, as well as FFI communication materials.

## PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Areas covered in presentations and discussions included the effectiveness of flour fortification as a vehicle in the reduction of anemia; the impact of folic acid on the reduction of folic acid deficiency and NTDs; and the significance of regulatory and internal monitoring, quality management systems, and solid data to ensure the success of fortification projects. All discussions and presentations highlighted the significance of millers' role to the success of flour fortification.



Welcome words and an overview of FFI's fortification efforts were presented by Nada Elhusseiny, FFI Technical Advisor for Egypt and North Africa. Dr. Wael Abas, Investment and Logistics Advisor to the Minister of MOSIT, reiterated the Ministry's support for and commitment to flour fortification as an integral strategy to improve nutrition. Dr. Saul Morris, Head of Programmes at GAIN, presented on the role of fortification in building a strong health system in Egypt, GAIN's support for fortification projects to create strong food systems, and fortification's role in mitigating climate change impacts. Dr. Naglaa Arafa, a UNICEF nutritionist, presented the direct link between the success of flour fortification and reaching United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in relation to the reduction of anemia. Dr. Runda Abou El Naga, Technical Advisor for WHO Egypt, gave a passionate presentation about the significance of fortification and the role it plays in meeting policy goals including the *100 Million Healthy Lives* initiative, SDGs, and goals for COP 27, a UN climate summit that will take place in Egypt in 2022. The WHO team reiterated their full support for and commitment to work with FFI and partners to launch the flour fortification project in Egypt.

FFI Director, Scott Montgomery, presented on flour fortification as an ideal intervention for Egypt given that Egypt is one of the largest consumers of wheat globally. A presentation by Dr. Sylvia Roozen, IF Secretary General, demonstrated the impact of NTDs on newborns and its implications on an individual, community, and country. The presentation demonstrated how countries can significantly reduce the prevalence of NTDs through fortification of flour with folic acid, a relatively simple and cost-effective intervention. This was followed by a presentation from the Neurokidz project team, representing Dr. Benjamin Warf (Harvard University), that reiterated the importance of folate for the health and well-being of newborns and society as a whole. Lastly, FFI shared an update on progress the program has achieved to date and discussed the potential for fortified flour to reach 90% of the population. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants were enthusiastic to help push the flour fortification project forward.

The participants reported being impressed with the professionalism of the workshop as well as the wealth of information that they received during modules, presentations, and discussions. One of the key strengths of the workshop was that it brought together stakeholders from all sectors involved in fortification. It allowed them to meet with their counterparts, to see how their role fits within the overall flour fortification project, and to discuss their challenges, areas of concern, and next steps face-to-face. The forum's environment supported openness and encouraged new ideas and opinions. The participants left the workshop with a better understanding of the significance of their work, beyond the mill and beyond their department, and their work's role in meeting the country's goals of a stronger and healthier future for all Egyptians.



## ACHIEVEMENTS AND WAY FORWARD

- WHO/EMRO would like to use workshop modules in the work that they are conducting in the region.
- WHO/EMRO will be in discussions with FFI regarding future potential collaboration.
- FFI will explore the potential for open market flour fortification to expand coverage to 90% of the Egyptian population.
- AMCHAM committed to support future FFI efforts through the organization's extended network of businesses contacts, leaders, and decisionmakers in Egypt.
- Embassy of Argentina is interested to explore potential linkages and to support the Egypt flour fortification project.
- Embassy of Ireland is interested in collaborating and finding out more about project.
- Though the Embassy of Canada was not able to attend, they are interested to know more about project.
- Takatuf NGO is interested in exploring new and potential ways of collaboration with the project.
- Discussions are ongoing with USAID on potential involvement in the project and partnership with FFI.
- Expansion of partnerships with new organizations that have expressed interest in the project as a result of the momentum built through the workshop.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Flour fortification is a timely, essential intervention that is needed for Egypt, especially in light of COVID-19. The frontlines of every country's health system are the immune systems of its people. Good nutrition helps boost the immune system, lowers the risk of becoming critically ill with infectious diseases, and supports faster recovery when infected. Furthermore, it was brought to the attention of the participants that fortification is an adaptable intervention well-suited for the social distancing requirements demanded by the COVID-19 pandemic: large-scale fortification does not require direct person-to-person contact to deliver micronutrients to beneficiaries.

The key message from the workshop is that the potential impact of relaunching flour fortification in Egypt has tremendous potential to not only improve lives, health, and wellbeing; it also has the potential to bring the country closer to reaching policy objectives such as Vision 2030 and the *100 Million Healthy Lives*. The flour fortification project is an investment in Egypt's people and future.