EGYPT

RESTARTING WHEAT FLOUR FORTIFICATION

The opportunity: potentially reach 90 million people with fortified wheat flour

BACKGROUND

During the COVID-19 pandemic, uncertainty of supply chains, increased premix prices, and trade restrictions have led some countries to scale back efforts to fortify grains with micronutrients that strengthen individual health and whole economies. Yet the commitment of Egypt's Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade (MOSIT) and MOSIT Minister, His Excellency Dr. Ali Moselhi, is clear: despite challenges posed by the pandemic, Egypt continues to partner with the Food Fortification Initiative (FFI) to restart the country's wheat flour fortification program, which ended in 2014.

THE PROBLEM

Malnutrition from deficiencies of folic acid and iron is a pressing public health and economic issue in Egypt: neural tube defects (NTDs) are three times what they could be if women had adequate intake of folic acid, WHO considers the number of women who suffer from anemia in Egypt a moderate public health problem, and losses in gross domestic product (GDP) from malnutrition are staggering.

5,700

babies born with an NTD each year*

NTDs are debilitating and often fatal. Many affected pregnancies are terminated; of live births, 75% of children die before their fifth birthday. Those who survive need life-long care.

35%

women are anemic**

Iron-deficiency anemia contributes to the deaths of women during pregnancy and childbirth and it reduces productivity.

$800 M

USD annual losses in GDP due to vitamin and mineral deficiencies (12.5 billion EGP)^

Iron-deficiency anemia stunts children's mental development and future earning ability and reduces adults' productivity; total lifetime costs for a patient with an NTD is US $620,484.^^

THE OPPORTUNITY

With marginal cost and the potential for sizeable returns, the opportunity to make a positive impact on Egyptians' health and economy through fortification is tremendous. If the Government of Egypt enacts mandatory fortification for subsidized wheat flour as well as wheat flour sold on the open market, fortified flour has the potential to reach 90% of the population, prevent 4,404 NTDs, and prevent 2.3 million cases of iron-deficiency anemia for women of reproductive age.

With FFI's support, MOSIT has made tremendous progress in restarting the program. Accomplishments include a comprehensive mill assessment that found 80% of Egyptian mills have the readiness and technical capacity to start flour fortification, formation of a high-level committee to oversee the flour fortification program, production of advocacy tools, drafting and operationalization of an Egypt-specific Monitoring Guideline for Fortification with the National Food Safety Authority, and establishment of a coalition of key fortification stakeholders and donor agencies to assist MOSIT in implementation of the program.

*Blencowe, H., et al. Estimates of global and regional prevalence of neural tube defects for 2015: a systematic analysis. Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences. 2018.
**World Health Organization. The global prevalence of anemia in 2011. Switzerland. 2015.
^Egypt World Bank. Nutrition at a Glance. Accessed 12 February 2020
^^Yi, Y.,et al. Economic burden of neural tube defects and impact of prevention with folic acid: a literature review. European Journal of Pediatrics. 2011.