

Smarter Futures Project Annual Narrative Report January 2021



Executive Summary

The Smarter Futures grant, received from the Dutch Government and administered through the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) to the International Federation of Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF), became effective as of March 1, 2018. The overall objective of this grant is to improve the reach, coverage, and adequacy of fortified grains throughout the African continent in order to improve the nutritional status of target populations. To this end, the Smarter Futures grant consists of a broad range of activities built on rigorous data analyses that identify areas most in need, areas where the fortification of industrially milled grains can have the greatest impact, and key challenge areas for programs already in progress but faltering. Through the grant's targeted efforts and unique partnerships, FFI, as the implementing partner with support from on-the-ground partners, aims to continue providing direct and indirect assistance to 10 countries over the next one year. These countries include (Angola, Botswana, Egypt, Morocco, Mozambique, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe). In addition to technical assistance, areas of focus in this grant include providing online fortification trainings, improving how compliance information is collected and acted upon, and convening regional implementing partners and government to ensure efforts are complementary, effectively targeted, and non-duplicative.

In light of the recent funding cut to this Smarter Futures grant, a number of activities have been eliminated. The revised Smarter Future work plan post-funding cut can be found [here](#). Numbers allocated to original activities have been retained. For example, under activity heading #1: Regional and Country-Specific QA/QC and Advocacy Training, post-funding cut activities include 1.2, 1.3, 1.6, and 1.8. The activities pertaining to the missing numbers have been eliminated.

Key activities undertaken since the last September 2020 reporting period:

- Facilitated an in-country led FortifyMIS training across 7 provinces in Mozambique as a scale-up to the initial Maputo-based trainings. This included training for private sector producers and external market, border inspectors, and production inspectors.
- Completed a legal assessment in Egypt of what it will take to mandate fortification of open market wheat flour. The analysis concluded that the Minister of Supply and Internal Trade (MOSIT) can simply issue a decree under current legislation that open market wheat flour is fortified. Next steps are meeting with the MOSIT team to discuss and give technical assistance in drafting the decree if requested. We are also discussing with MOSIT the grace period needed to allow the private sector millers to

prepare for fortification. The details of our Egypt work will be reported in the Egypt-specific grant from GAIN and not this Smarter Futures report.

- Completed a virtual Monitoring ‘Challenge’ Workshop to address persistent and inherent challenges around non-compliance and subsequently began discussions with the workshop’s two winning teams regarding targeted support to address their regulatory monitoring solutions. This targeted support to the winning teams is in lieu of the in-person meeting that could not take place due to COVID.
- Began specific work activities with government and partners in Angola, Namibia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Top achievement during this reporting period:

Completed the *virtual* Monitoring Challenge Workshop on Slack. The Fortification Monitoring Challenge Workshop originally planned for May 2020 in Johannesburg, South Africa was postponed and moved to a virtual format, Slack. The meeting ran from August through October 2020. Ten countries (Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda) were short-listed and invited to attend based on their status of fortification and progress towards implementing regulatory monitoring measures. Although 10 countries were invited, only 6 (Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda) were active contributors throughout the virtual meeting. Although the level of contribution from each team seemed to be limited due to the virtual nature of the meeting, two winning teams (Senegal and Nigeria) surfaced following a workshop-wide vote on the most effective and realistic solutions. Given the fact that an in-person meeting would not be possible due to continued COVID restrictions, the workshop organizers decided the ‘prize’ for the winning teams should be targeted technical assistance to operationalize their respective solutions. Further details and proposed next steps are provided below.

Continued FortifyMIS Training in Mozambique (despite COVID). From October to November 2020, FFI facilitated multiple FortifyMIS trainings, through GAIN-Mozambique on the ground, of 88 individuals across 7 provinces. FFI is also supporting the revision of Mozambique’s inspection checklists at the producer, importer, and market levels as part of the support requested by government to improve their regulatory monitoring processes.

Support to Namibia’s Fortification Strategy Drafting. IGN is leading the drafting of a national fortification strategy in Namibia in close collaboration with FFI. Between October and November, we worked closely with IGN on the strategy writing, particularly the regulatory monitoring component and strategized around next steps required with government.

Challenges faced / variances with what was planned

Two main challenges surfaced since the last reporting period:

1. The lack of strong participation from all 10 countries short-listed for the virtual Monitoring ‘Challenge’ Workshop as outlined below, and
2. The significant budget cut instated by GAIN. As a result of the cut, several activities were altered and / or eliminated.

Main focus areas for the Q1-Q4 2021:

- Provide direct technical assistance to Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and South Africa. Although Botswana and Mauritius were slated to receive direct technical assistance, the impacts of COVID have brought our work in these two settings to a near standstill. As a result, we have pivoted our priorities and decided it would be more effective to leverage FFI's already-existing presence on the ground in Uganda, the fact that Uganda is struggling with fortification production and compliance, and the fact that there is no implementing partner supporting the government of Uganda on fortification at this point in time. Further details regarding the work in Uganda are provided below.
- Documentation of the challenges and proposed 'winning' solutions from the virtual Monitoring 'Challenge' Workshop and support provided to two winning countries to ensure implementation of proposed country plans.
- Prove the viability (or not) of the MIS in Mozambique and Uganda and generate a revised point of view on key next steps globally.

The activities outlined below provide a summary of progress made to date and proposed plans on work plan objectives slated for Q1-Q4 2021. Activities reported as complete in previous reports are not included in this update, activities eliminated as a result of the recent budget cut are not been included in this update, and alterations to activities due to budget cuts or otherwise have been captured in the re-wording of the activity.

Activity Summary

Section 1: Regional and Country-Specific Trainings

1.2 Support to two countries identified in the Fortification Monitoring Challenge Workshop (in place of holding an in-person workshop in 2021 in light of continued COVID restrictions)

Timeline: Q1-Q3 2021

Status: [In progress](#)

From August to October 2020, Smarter Futures and the Lodestar Centre of Excellence hosted a virtual Fortification Monitoring 'Challenge' workshop. The agenda for the virtual meeting can be found [here](#). Ten country teams within Africa (Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda) were invited to attend based on their stage of fortification programming and attempts to put in place effective regulatory monitoring systems. Teams from each country were asked to outline a) their specific fortification monitoring challenges from the perspective of both industry and government and b) how they might address these specific challenges *using existing human and financial resources at their disposal*. In other words, the solutions they were asked to propose to address their regulatory monitoring challenges could not include anything that required further inputs or resources. The goal was to spur creative thinking around how this data might be obtained in more effective and realistic ways today. The hope was that the

teams would leverage multiple tools and methods that currently exist to address their challenges. Unfortunately, most of the solutions obtained from country teams revolved around the need for additional trainings and additional funding. It is unclear whether the team responses were due to a lack of understanding of the question being asked, a lack of awareness of the tools and methods that currently exist to address their challenges, resistance internally to move away from more traditional means of collecting fortification quality data, or otherwise. This more nuanced understanding was not obtained from the workshop participants.

Although the level of contribution from each team seemed to be limited due to the virtual nature of the meeting, two winning teams (Senegal and Nigeria) surfaced following a workshop-wide vote on the most effective and realistic solutions. Given the fact that an in-person meeting would not be possible due to continued COVID restrictions, the workshop organizers decided the 'prize' for the winning teams should be targeted technical assistance to operationalize their respective solutions.

A final report for the virtual Fortification Monitoring Challenge Workshop is still pending.

The Senegal team consisted of representatives from government (Ministry of Industry and the Institute of Food Technology), food producers (two flour producers), and an in-country development partner (Nutrition International). Although Senegal has a strong monitoring system in place for wheat flour fortification with current estimates indicating that 90% of the flour is compliant with national standards, this is not the case for cooking oil. Unlike flour, 30% of the cooking oil in Senegal is produced locally by artisanal, small-scale producers making effective monitoring extremely difficult. Senegal faces a similar situation with salt, with most of the salt being produced at small-scale production facilities. With support from Nutrition International (NI), these small-scale salt producers have been organized into cooperatives so that iodization can happen at a central processing unit making production and monitoring more effective. A cost-recovery system via a revolving fund for potassium iodate has been in place in Senegal for salt producers for the past ten years. Similarly, rice producers have organized into cooperatives to ensure quality production (although there is no rice fortification taking place). With technical assistance from an individual consultant, the Senegalese team would like to learn from both the centralized salt iodization and cooperative model and the rice producer cooperative model and how it can be applied to ensure effective fortification among artisanal cooking oil producers.

The objective of the assignment in Senegal will be to conduct a landscape analysis of cooking oil producers in Senegal and outline what is required to modify and replicate Senegal's salt iodization model as well as what lessons can be learned from Senegal's rice producer's model and apply it to artisanal cooking oil producers. The specifics of the assignment can be found [here](#) in the TOR.

Next steps in Senegal: Once we hear back from the team in Senegal on the finalization of the TOR, we will post for hiring.

The Nigeria team consisted of representatives from government (Ministry of Health, Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON), and NAFDAC), food producers (two flour producers), and an in-country development partner (GAIN). Discussions with the Nigeria team are still in the nascent stages. Following a call in December 2020, the team has decided to meet internally to prioritize which regulatory monitoring solution identified in the workshop they will prioritize to operationalize with our support.

Next steps in Nigeria: Follow-up discussions are planned for the month of January in order to finalize the team's priority solution and identify what form of TA is most appropriate.

1.3. Remote FortifyMIS support provided to Mozambique and Uganda including regional trainings for partners.

Timeline: Q1-Q4 2021

Status: [In progress](#)

Between October and November 2020, FFI facilitated GAIN-based staff in Maputo to lead FortifyMIS trainings across 7 provinces in Mozambique (Tete, Sofala, Nampula, Cabo Delgado, Inhambane, Zambezia, and Maputo) as a scale-up to the initial Maputo-based trainings. This included training for private sector producers and external market, border inspectors, and production inspectors. The training sessions were divided into two distinct approaches: in-class training and in-the-field training to simulate data collection. Eighty-eight (88) individuals were trained from regulatory inspectorates, Provincial Directorate for Industry and Commerce (DPIC), Customs authorities, market inspectorates, ProConsumers Association, private sector representatives, and Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MIC). The final training report can be found [here](#).

In Uganda, UNBS and the MoH determined that they would prefer to use the FortifyMIS to collect market inspection data at the national level and for internal use by producers. FFI is currently working with these two agencies to further define next steps.

Next Steps in Mozambique:

- MIC and GAIN-Mozambique plan to meet in January to discuss how to ensure FortifyMIS continues to be used across the already-trained 7 provinces including an effective solution to securing hand-held devices for all users as well as plans to continue to scale-up to additional provinces. The preliminary plan is to run another round of trainings in February in 7 new provinces.
- Continue to provide support to strengthen the overall fortification monitoring framework in Mozambique.

Next Steps in Uganda:

- Uganda's National Fortification Alliance needs to convene early in 2021 to identify a new point person for the MIS in Uganda with whom we can coordinate.
- Sync the MIS market inspection component with the needs of Uganda's data and decision-making at the market and internal production level.

- Train relevant market inspectors and food producers first in the Kampala region before seeking government approval for a larger roll-out nationally.

1.6 Participation in relevant regional fortification meetings to share good practices.

Timeline: Q1-Q4 2021

Status: [In progress](#)

Following FFI's participation in August 2020 in the Southern African Development Cooperation's (SADC) consultative meeting on regional minimum standards, TA for these standards, and TA for a regional regulatory monitoring guideline document as outlined in the previous report, no further regional meetings were attended.

1.8 Participation in IAOM meeting in 2020 venue TBD.

Timeline: Q4 2021

The plan is to attend the 2021 MEA/IAOM meeting pending availability of funds.

Section 3. In-Country Capacity Building

Where relevant, collaborations are sought and strengthened with IF's in-country parent associations.

3.2 Technical assistance to Egypt

Timeline: Q1-Q4 2021

Status: [In progress](#)

The activities and most of the budget related to this workstream have been moved to a separate Egypt-specific grant awarded to FFI by GAIN and thus have been removed from this Smarter Futures grant. The exception to this is a portion of our Egypt-based Technical Advisor's time (Nada Elhusseiny).

3.3 Technical assistance to Morocco

Timeline: Q1-Q4 2021

Status: [In progress](#)

In July 2020, FFI took part in a virtual meeting in Morocco organized by Muhlenchemie based on interest from the Milling Federation to improve key programming components. Participants at the virtual meeting included FFI, that National Milling. Federation, and Muhlenchemie staff from Morocco and Germany. FFI was asked to support miller awareness around the importance of fortification and its health benefits, improvements in internal and external monitoring approaches, and innovative solutions for financing premix. Muhlenchemie was asked to support a mill webinar on how to fortify and support to AgroLab around testing.

Next steps: The National Milling Federation will organize a larger virtual meeting / seminar in the coming months that will include FFI and Muhlenchemie's suggestions regarding the above-mentioned areas of need.

3.4 Technical assistance to Angola

Timeline: Q1-Q4 2021

Status: [In progress](#)

Currently, WFP has a MoU with the Government of Angola to support the design and implementation of large-scale fortification. A detailed workplan that includes phases related to planning, implementation and monitoring, and impact assessment has been drafted by WFP and is currently underway with the Government. After meeting virtually with WFP Angola in July, it was decided that FFI could complement the work WFP is doing, particularly in light of the request FFI received from the Webcor Group (Angola's largest wheat flour producer) regarding a need for technical assistance to begin fortification.

Next steps: Another joint meeting will be held in January that will spell out the specific areas of support that FFI and WFP, respectively, will lead. FFI's support will likely fall largely around supporting the private sector and in putting in place a monitoring framework.

3.7 Targeted technical assistance provided to two SADC countries as identified in activity 2.1 following the SADC workshop.

Timeline: Q1 – Q4 2021

Status: [In progress](#)

Following initial discussions with the SADC Secretariat Partner Coalition team on the outcomes and next steps of the SADC meeting, FFI will serve as lead agency in support to *South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, and Mauritius*. Funding under this Smarter Futures grant will include support to *South Africa, Angola* (already outlined above) and *Zimbabwe* only. Support for Botswana, Namibia, and Mauritius will be funded from other sources; however, an update is still provided. As of December 2020, support to Uganda has replaced the support to Botswana and Mauritius due to slower than expected progress in these two countries as a result of COVID. With boots on the ground in Uganda, FFI will shift its focus for more effective programming at this time.

South Africa: Per the request of the National Department of Health, FFI's objective in South Africa is to strengthen the national fortification monitoring framework. Throughout 2019 and 2020 this included extensive input throughout the drafting of South Africa's Monitoring Implementation Guidelines. In 2021, it will include technical assistance in the development of tools and training to operationalize the Guidelines. Based on in-depth discussions in 2019 with key stakeholders involved in South Africa's fortification program, FFI's recommendation to the Department of Health was to explore alternative means of determining fortification program compliance using the country's SAGIS system. To this end, the Department of Health petitioned SAGIS in 2020 to include an additional indicator in their data collection process that includes premix usage (they already collect production

information). In July 2020, SAGIS accepted this recommendation. When they will begin collecting is additional data point is TBD however, if successful, this approach will serve as an example for the region on how to use existing resources to infer national compliance.

South Africa Next Steps: FFI to provide technical assistance in the development of tools and trainings to operationalize the Guidelines and ensure the necessary next steps are taken to act upon the new SAGIS data. Additionally, FFI will advocate for the promulgation of the new fortification standards, which now include cake flour.

Zimbabwe: Per the request of the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) and UNICEF-Zimbabwe, FFI's objective it to guide the country in the development of a national fortification strategy with a particular focus on the drafting of monitoring and communication plans within the strategy. Throughout this process, FFI will also support the country as necessary to ensure adoption of the drafted standards and more effective engagement with the private sector.

Starting in August, FFI has been supporting the hired consultants in Zimbabwe around the initial data collection for the strategy. FFI still plans to financially support the government-based consultant per our original agreement with MoHCC and UNICEF-Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe Next Steps: FFI will engage on a regular basis with the consultant throughout the data collection and writing process. Additionally, FFI will provide salary for one year for a government-based consultant who will shadow the strategy consultant, once hired. Following the completion of the strategy, this government consultant will then be placed permanently within the MoHCC and be responsible for all national fortification activities. Finally, FFI will support standards finalization and adoption, and improved miller engagement.

Namibia: Namibia is interested in pursuing a fortification program after obtaining and reviewing national-level consumption and deficiency data. As a result, FFI's objective in Namibia is to assist in the generation of data and subsequent policy and regulatory support based on data findings. Currently, UNICEF and IGN are leading a situation analysis and fortification strategy development process. FFI is supporting IGN in the strategy writing process with a particular focus on regulatory monitoring recommendations. A draft of the supported strategy can be found [here](#).

Namibia Next Steps: Continue to support IGN in the strategy drafting process and recommendations around a regulatory monitoring framework. When possible, support training related to the suggested framework.

Uganda: According to the Pull Strategy market assessments that were conducted in 2018 and followed in 2019, not all the maize flour and oil producers eligible to fortify were fortifying. Secondly, compliance to the national standards were very low. As the COVID pandemic set in, there have not been any effective regulatory monitoring going on to obtain a credible report nor has there been any attempt to understand how COVID has affected compliance. It is against this background that, FFI is proposing to conduct a mill assessment. The objectives of the assessment are twofold:

1. Update the inventory of wheat millers, maize millers and oil producers, and
2. Ascertain the status of fortification and challenges brought about by COVID and how the mills are coping with the situation to ensure compliance to fortification standards.

In addition to the flour mills assessment, the assessment will include edible oils and fats. Since salt consumed in Uganda is largely imported from Kenya, the assessment will not focus on salt.

Uganda Next Steps: Finalize the mill assessment questionnaire and coordinate mill visits with government. A draft of the proposed mill assessment can be found [here](#).

3.8 Conduct country-specific trainings for civil society organizations to create demand for fortified products. This will also be informed by 2.1: identified countries struggling with compliance.

Timeline: Q1 2019 – Q4 2021

Status: [In progress](#).

Originally, this activity included two components: 1) Pull Project Lessons and Opportunities and 2) Engagement with and Training of SBH Associations. The first component is no longer being pursued due to a lack of funding.

Engagement with and Training of Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (SBH) Associations. This includes engagement with country-specific SBH associations in order to build their capacity and train them on how to effectively engage and participate in fortification discussions and efforts. Ultimately the goal is for civil society group advocacy efforts to result in increased demand for fortified products.

IF is currently working with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Associations in 12 African countries including Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and continues to actively seek further opportunities for similar engagement in other African countries where the organization has an active SBH Association presence. Despite the competing priorities during the Covid-19 pandemic, communications and clinic activities have continued with Uganda, Malawi, Ethiopia and Nigeria to help ensure that momentum is maintained and that folic acid fortification and NTD prevention is kept on the agenda.

Activities include:

- a) Mapping exercises to assess and address current knowledge, understanding, and needs among representatives of SBH Associations;
- b) Development of regular, short trainings with representatives of SBH Associations to increase their capacity to advocate for and monitor fortification efforts, including:
 - a. Online meetings to build capacity with member organizations in, but not limited to, Uganda, Malawi, Nigeria, and Ethiopia
 - b. Training on the important role of patients as strongest advocates for prevention
 - c. Training on food fortification
 - d. Training on network building

- e. Training on human rights and advocacy
 - f. Training on policy development and monitoring
 - g. Facilitating opportunities for peer to peer learning on fortification/NTD prevention advocacy
 - h. Meetings and consultation with Dr. Aziza Mustafa Alnaeema, IF board member, and representative of the Sudan Federal Spina Bifida Association on the planned fortification meeting for Q4 2019, which, first due to civil unrest, was postponed to 2020 and now due to the Covid-19 pandemic will be developed in 2021.
- c) New detailed country specific profiles have been created for Malawi and Nigeria in IF's country-specific database that contains information on NTD prevention and the role of representative organizations. The database will continue to be expanded as more information is gained and further country profiles are added;
- d) Translations of folic acid/prevention awareness raising materials (i.e. IF's '*Folic Acid – What Every Woman Needs to Know BEFORE Becoming Pregnant*', with bespoke tailoring (and translation as required), ensuring use of culturally relevant images, cultural practices and highlighting relevant local sources of natural/fortified folate rich foods);
- e) Direct technical support to the IF Member Associations at IF's Secretariat:
- o Sylvia Roozen: to develop and strengthen strategic partnerships within and between countries, to develop country specific advocacy capacity, program development, facilitate learning opportunities, provide networking support, political support, and reporting;
 - o Martine Austin, Consultant, Program Manager Global Prevention Initiative: to support members in development of advocacy strategy, awareness raising/health promotion activity/materials and follow-up with individual countries and development of country profiles.

Next Steps: Engage other SBH associations across Africa in country specific prevention clinics to be held quarterly (combination of new and 'follow-up' development calls); building knowledge, confidence and capacity among SBH local associations and continuing to develop a progressive network of active, empowered and proficient associations. Support SBH Associations with coordinating awareness raising activities (relative to organizational capacity) in conjunction with the World Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Day (Oct 2021) as well as the World Folic Acid Awareness Week (Jan 2021).

Section 4: Global Resources for Effective Implementation

4.2. Include one of the above-mentioned trainings in local university or milling school curriculum to provide the information to up and coming professionals.

Timeline: Q1 – Q4 2021

Status: [In progress](#).

Schools with milling curriculum:

Opportunities may and / or do exist in the following curriculums/schools:

- Nairobi's Milling School – This training took place in December 2019 and included training on flour quality and fortification. It was a joint effort between Buhler, BioAnalyt, and Technoserve. Material, supported by content from FFI, can be found [here](#) and [here](#). There are currently plans in place to continue to offer this training in the future.
- Morocco Milling School – FFI to review 2003 curriculum currently in use and update as necessary.
- Others listed on the IAOM website- <https://www.iaom.info/industry-resources/schools/>

Other schools outside of Africa to review include:

- Buhler, Switzerland
- North Dakota State University
- SIGI Canada
- China (three milling schools)
- Northern Crops Institute

Next Steps: Shawn Thiele, the Associate Director, International Grains Program, Flour Milling and Curriculum Manager at Kansas State University (KSU) shared the current teaching module used at KSU regarding flour additives. We are adding suggested content to the module focusing on why fortify and the tremendous health benefits that the milling industry delivers. FFI will also prioritize following up and supporting the Morocco Milling School, as necessary, in 2021.

Section 5: Organizational Learning

5.1 Develop a system for regular feedback and monitoring of SF workshops including a more systematic follow-up on the usage of the tools, the progress made towards institutionalization, and commitments made by institutions.

Timeline: Q1-Q4 2021

Status: [In progress](#)

Pre- and post-training tools have been developed for all Smarter Futures workshops. These include pre- and post-training assessments of knowledge retention and six to twelve-month post-workshop evaluations to gauge how the information obtained in the workshop is used in day-to-day work life, how the knowledge may be institutionalized, and any institutional commitments in terms of fortification. The assessments and evaluations have been used to date following the Oct 2018 SADC meeting, the two Ethiopia Training of Trainers events held in March and May 2019, and the virtual Monitoring Challenge Workshop held between August and October 2020. The immediate post-training evaluation for the Monitoring Challenge Workshop can be found [here](#). Although pre / post assessments proved very effective, the 6-12 month follow-up evaluations have had a poor return rate necessitating an alternative method (likely phone calls) of obtaining such information. Such an alternative method will be tried following the virtual Monitoring Challenge Workshop.

Next Steps: Identify alternative means of obtaining 6-12-month follow-up evaluation data for use upon completion of the Challenge Workshop.