

FOOD FORTIFICATION PROGRAMME  
**PROGRAMME BRIEF**

# Fortifying Pakistan's Future

## Food Fortification is Essential for Progress and Growth

Food fortification is an essential, cost effective means of improving the nutritional status of the population. Adding vitamins and minerals to foods such as wheat flour and edible oils prevents diseases, strengthens immune systems and improves cognitive development and productivity. Given that these foods are consumed daily by most of the population, food fortification can yield dramatic improvements in nutritional status without a change in eating habits. For women and young children in particular, adding vital nutrients to food ensures safer pregnancies and a healthier start in life in those crucial first 1000 days of development, ultimately leading to higher education outcomes and economic productivity.

## Pakistan Faces a Malnutrition Emergency

The latest National Nutrition Survey (2018) revealed very high rates of micronutrient deficiencies. In Pakistan 41.7% women of reproductive age (WRA) are anaemic, 18.2% iron deficient, 27.3% deficient in vitamin A, and 79.7% in vitamin D. The problem repeats itself in children with 53.7% of under 5s suffering from anaemia, 51.5% from vitamin A deficiency, and 62.7% from vitamin D deficiency. Every year approximately 500,000 children die before reaching their fifth birthday, up to half of them due to factors related to malnutrition. Nearly half of Pakistan's children are chronically malnourished, which causes life-long damage to brain development and immunity. Pakistan's rates of malnutrition are stagnating compared to reductions seen in neighboring countries. Failing to address this emergency will hinder Pakistan's progress.

## Committed to Action

The positive news is that there is political will across the board to act. Federal and Provincial governments of Pakistan are committed to ending malnutrition through food fortification. Vision 2025 envisages a hunger free Pakistan, providing safe food and adequate nutrition for the whole population. The Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) has issued Pakistan Standard Specifications for fortified wheat flour and edible oil/ ghee. A revitalised National Fortification Alliance is in operation, with all provinces having constituted Provincial Fortification Alliances. In most provinces legislation to fortify edible oils with Vitamin A is in place. This commitment provides a platform to extend legislation and ensure enforcement of the fortification of wheat flour and edible oil across Pakistan.

## Seizing the Opportunity

The Food Fortification Programme (FFP) is timely. The UK Department for International Development is providing £48 million over the next five years to work at government, industry and consumer levels to transform the nutritional status of people across Pakistan, particularly women of child bearing age and children. FFP will significantly enhance the production, access and consumption of fortified wheat flour with iron and folic acid and edible oils and ghee with vitamin A. Other important fortification efforts on which FFP will build include the Nutrition International's work on Universal Salt Iodisation (USI) and the work of World Food Program and GAIN, which have been supported by donors including USAID and Australian DFAT.

## Improving Legislation and Enforcement

To achieve these goals, FFP is supporting governments at federal, provincial and district level to put in place effective technical standards and legislative and regulatory frameworks so that food fortification is comprehensive and effective. To ensure laws can be enforced, FFP is also supporting government capacity and infrastructure for laboratory testing so that fortification is conducted to quality standards. At the same time, FFP is working with decision makers and parliamentarians so that the subject of food fortification remains high on the policy agenda and that commitments can be carried through to action.

## Supporting Industry to Fortify

Food fortification also requires support and action from industry. That is why FFP is providing technical assistance to producers of wheat flour, edible oil and ghee. This support will help prepare millers for mandatory legislation and inspection for adequate commodity fortification, contributing towards the financial costs of micro-feeder equipment. FFP will provide subsidies to mills towards the cost of premix as an incentive to produce high quality fortified food. Working directly with millers as well as with industry associations, FFP is providing practical training and guidance as the industry adopts fortification processes.

## Promoting the Benefits for Communities

At the consumer level, FFP recognises that awareness of the benefits is low and there is some resistance to purchase fortified food because of perceived costs or taste. To meet these concerns, FFP is engaging at a district level with public awareness and education campaigns to increase demand and promote fortified foods. Working, for example, with Lady Health Workers (LHWs), FFP will convey important information about the importance of families, especially pregnant and lactating women, consuming fortified foods along with other healthy feeding practices. Elsewhere, products fortified under FFP will be promoted by Community Based Organisations and at points of sale.

## Evidence Informing Decision Making

Supporting these activities with government, industry and consumers FFP is making sure robust evidence informs decision making and action. FFP is commissioning high quality research into food fortification practices and policies, equipping all stakeholders with powerful arguments to sustain progress.

## FFP – Focused on Results

Over 5 years FFP is putting in place the conditions for sustainable food fortification for generations to come and expects dramatic results. By 2021, FFP will see:

### **Government equipped to enforce**

Mandatory legislation for fortification across Pakistan as well as improved standards, regulatory compliance, quality assurance and quality control.

### **Industry universally fortifying**

Improved management and administration to meet legislative requirements, technical assistance for mixing and storage of premixes, building industry capacity for compliance and testing. Over 1000 wheat flour mills and 100 edible oil mills will be meeting standards.

### **Consumers demanding fortified foods**

Consumers will be aware of and positive towards the benefits of fortified foods.

### **Healthier women and children**

Project aims to reduce iron deficiency anemia by 13.5% in children and 12.3% in women. Similarly, it aims to reduce 35% of vitamin A deficiency among children and 27% in women of reproductive age group. Other serious deficiency related to Vitamin D deficiency are also likely to improve.

## Working at Every Level

Pakistan's future depends upon tackling its malnutrition crisis. That is why FFP is focused on creating the legal and industry reforms that can make the production and consumption of fortified foods the norm across the country. This means working at every level of government and industry; with food and health departments and others; with the National and Provincial Fortification Alliances; with industry associations and directly with millers; and with communities to transform policy and practice for food fortification.