

Conference on  
Fortification of Processed Foods  
The Way to Healthier Diet

Dhaka, Bangladesh  
Monday, December 15, 2003

**DHAKA DECLARATION**

Sponsored By

ILSI South Asia Bangladesh Committee (ILSI-SABC)

International Life Sciences Institute, India (ILSI-India)

ILSI Human Nutrition Institute, Washington DC (ILSI)

The Micronutrient Initiative (MI)

World Food Program of United Nations (WFP)

# Conference on Fortification of Processed Foods: The Way to Healthier Diet

## Dhaka Declaration : The Next Steps

The “**Conference on Fortification of Processed Foods: The Way to Healthier Diet**” was held in Dhaka on December 15, 2003. Over 150 delegates from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and other countries’ as also from international organizations, participated. The Conference was inaugurated by Mr Abdullah Al Noman, Hon’ble, Minister for Food, Government of Bangladesh.

The Conference reviewed the micronutrient malnutrition status in Bangladesh and initiatives taken by national and international organizations to identify and mitigate health problems resulting from micronutrient deficiencies. There was, however, a vast ground to cover for which a comprehensive approach was called for.

During the presentations and discussions the participants made the following suggestions and recommendations:

### ➤ **The Problem**

The majority of people in Bangladesh are exposed to health disorders arising from micronutrient deficiencies. The critical micronutrients which should be given special attention are: iron, iodine and vitamin A. Deficiencies of these micronutrients have led to health disorders like anaemia, goiter, mental retardation, blindness, morbidity and high mortality particularly among women and children.

The health problems have reduced productivity of labor and resulted in an estimated loss of 5% of national income because of deficiencies of critical micronutrients. The 1997 “National Nutrition Policy” of Bangladesh has set out a comprehensive approach to improve the health profile of the country.

### ➤ **Healthier Diet Through Food Fortification**

The most practiced method so far has been supplementation. However, it has had limited impact since it can be useful mainly in respect of target groups like

pregnant women or school children, and is administratively difficult and costly. It is only food fortification that can have a wide reach to cover the total population.

The critical micronutrients viz. iron, iodine and vitamin A can be delivered, looking at the food habits in Bangladesh, through vehicles like: rice, wheat flour, bakery products, milk, salt, sugar and edible oils. Multiple vehicles should be thought of for fortification since food habits differ considerably within the country. Also double / multiple fortification of some of the commonly consumed products like salt need to be initiated.

Fortification can be an effective means because it is the least costly, imposes no burden on government and is within the purchasing power of the poorer sections of the society.

### ➤ Means to Promote Fortification: Shared Responsibilities

Governments, industry and R&D institutions, NGOs and international organizations have to take coordinated steps to promote and facilitate food fortification.

#### **Government**

1. Government and NGOs should create public awareness about micronutrients and the benefit of fortified foods, through social marketing with the support of international agencies.
2. In school feeding programs for children fortified food products should be used.
3. Food regulations, in particular the "Food Purity Act", should be reformed in a manner that will enable and encourage food fortification. They should specify the products to be fortified and the fortificants that should be used. Nutritional labeling of fortified foods will help consumers make informed choice.
4. Food regulations should also be brought in conformity with internationally accepted disciplines like Codex.
5. Fortified foods should be more favorably treated in respect of indirect taxes like excise duties, sales tax and other local taxes to bring them within the reach of poorer sections of society.

## **Industry**

1. While food fortification is commercially viable, industry should make special efforts to reach rural areas through effective marketing.
2. Technologies in respect of fortification of products like salt, sugar, milk etc. are well established. Industry should also support development of new technologies for fortification of products like spices and for multiple fortification for products like salt, milk, etc.
3. Some initiatives have been taken to fortify wheat flour, biscuits, etc. by large and medium industries. However, considerable processing of foods is undertaken by small enterprises which are not aware of the need for fortification or have no access to appropriate technologies. Chambers of Commerce should give special attention to this sector and devise and support fortification program.

## **Infrastructure**

1. Government laboratories should be upgraded to analyze fortified foods. International organizations should extend assistance for this purpose.
2. A forum should be constituted consisting of representatives of Ministries, R&D institutions, industry, international organizations, and NGOs to deliberate on all food fortification issues, monitor progress and assess the impact of fortification.