



DEVELOPMENT POLICIES & PRACTICES

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Targeted food fortification

An opportunity to sustainably prevent malnutrition

MORE THAN 2 BILLION PEOPLE¹, WORLDWIDE, THE MAJORITY OF WHOM ARE WOMEN AND CHILDREN, DO NOT CONSUME THE QUANTITIES OF VITAMINS AND MINERALS THEY NEED TO LIVE AND DEVELOP HEALTHILY. THIS HAS DIRE CONSEQUENCES NOT JUST FOR THEM, BUT ALSO FOR THE NEXT GENERATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR COUNTRY.

TO TACKLE THIS SCOURGE, IT IS CRUCIAL TO TAKE A SYSTEMIC, MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH. AMONG THE VARIOUS POSSIBLE STRATEGIES, THE FAO AND WHO HAVE IDENTIFIED FOOD FORTIFICATION – OFTEN LITTLE KNOWN AND MISUNDERSTOOD – AS ONE OF THE MOST PROFITABLE AND EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS.

IN COALITION WITH OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ORGANISATIONS, GRET HAS BEEN TESTING TARGETED FOOD FORTIFICATION AMONG THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS. TODAY IT SUPPORTS THIS APPROACH, UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS, RECOGNISING ITS STRONG POTENTIAL TO PREVENT MALNUTRITION AND MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES, AND ISSUING SOME KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO NUTRITION AND DEVELOPMENT ACTORS.

Support for local value chains producing targeted fortified foods

GRET recommends an overall approach to preventing all forms of malnutrition (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight), by prioritising specific actions that improve the health of women and young children.

For 30 years now, in partnership with IRD, through its nutrition programme (Nutridev), GRET has been working to improve the diets of the most vulnerable groups: women and children, in particular during the critical “1,000 days” period². It does this by supporting local value chains manufacturing quality foods, which have been fortified since the 2,000s when food micronutrient deficiencies emerged as a decisive element in the prevention of malnutrition.

Today, its specific actions focus on:

- supporting the development, production/quality control, promotion, and distribution of these foods;
- needs-based strengthening of businesses' governance and management;
- testing of innovative approaches to social entrepreneurship;
- supporting the legal environment and the regulation of the entire value chain by public authorities, to encourage businesses to mobilise while controlling their action.

GRET

GRET is an international fair development NGO that has been working for more than 40 years from field level to political level to combat poverty and inequalities.

GRET brings together local public authorities, private stakeholders (businesses...), the world of research, financiers and families. It structures and facilitates these partnerships on a daily basis, thanks to dedicated multi-disciplinary and outreach teams.

... through food systems that are more sustainable and more conducive to nutrition

GRET's support for these value chains is part of broader support for transition to food systems that are more sustainable and more conducive to nutrition: it contributes, with some limits, to food and nutrition security, social and economic equity, and environmental integrity.

Food and nutrition security

Targeted fortified foods have strong potential to sustainably contribute to improved access to healthy diets, taking all nutritional needs into account:

- They contribute to providing an immediate response to greater nutritional needs at certain periods of life. From the age of 6 months, the volume of a child's stomach is very small given the nutritional intake necessary to ensure that the child develops properly: manufactured fortified infant flours are encouraged³ as a complement to breast milk because they make it possible to consume a balanced porridge with greater nutritional density than traditional foods.
- The offer of quality fortified foods that are affordable for the target groups (young children, women – particularly during pregnancy and breastfeeding, pre-school and school children, adolescents, etc.) is still very rare, whereas it provides a useful additional solution to families, particularly in contexts where food diversity is poor.
- The health and nutritional quality of these foods must be irreproachable (respect of international and national norms and recommendations). To be consumed, they must also be appealing and in line with demand: be available, affordable, keep well, easy to use, pleasant in terms of taste, smell, colour, and texture, and they must also be aspirational for the target group. In this respect, GRET considers targeted food fortification as a means to improve the quality of food, and not as a final purpose. According to contexts, it is not always necessary.
- These foods must be part of and contribute to a healthy diet, which it is key to promote, taking account of the context and particularly the issues of nutritional transition and the growth of non-communicable diseases. It is therefore inconceivable to support foods belonging to a



FOOD FORTIFICATION: DEFINITION AND OBJECTIVES

The WHO and the FAO define food fortification as the addition of micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) to a food so as to provide a public health benefit with minimal risk⁴. When fortified foods are intended for consumption by the entire population, food fortification is qualified as "mass", as is the case with the addition of iodine to salt. When foods are targeted at specific groups who are particularly vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies, such as children aged 6 to 24 months, pregnant and breastfeeding women or older people, fortification is specifically adapted to their nutritional needs and is referred to as "targeted". As they are targeted, these foods reach less people, but with higher levels of fortification, and generally contain a greater number of minerals and vitamins (up to twenty compared to 1 or 2 in the case of mass fortification). They therefore have a higher nutritional impact on the people targeted.

category of products that would be too fatty, salty, sweet⁵ or containing controversial chemical additives.

- GRET does not support commercial communication on fortified foods without separate social communication to the same target group, i.e. without explaining the role of these foods in a healthy diet while encouraging food diversity and, for young children, breastfeeding.

Social and economic equity

It is strengthened by:

- giving year-round geographic and economic access to quality products in contexts where the offer is low, inappropriate/poor in quality or too expensive for low-income families;
- being vigilant about access to reliable food information (commercial and social communication, labelling) suited to gender contexts and dynamics;
- recruiting all types of private partners locally and often for the long term, to work on activities combining economic profitability and social impacts;
- creating local jobs, often occupied by women, thereby improving incomes and living conditions;
- encouraging dialogue between various stakeholders to i) ensure better understanding of nutrition and fortification, and of the role of the local private sector in nutrition, ii) minimise any possible loopholes such as risks around conflicts of interest and interference by the private sector, particularly international, in the governance of nutrition.

Environmental integrity

GRET also aims to include ecological transition in its actions to support fortified food value chains, for which combining social, economic and environmental impact is a very difficult compromise⁶: agro-ecological support for raw materials producers; ecological diagnoses of processing units, local and seasonal products; support with traceability/quality; and research on more environmentally friendly packaging.

Fortification therefore plays a major role in transition to healthier, more sustainable food systems, but it should be implemented:

- in tandem with other approaches to prevent malnutrition, in particular food diversity, which generates the most desirable and most sustainable changes;
- as an integral part of the local fortified food value chain environment (legal, political, research), which it should strengthen when applicable;
- taking account of the multidimensional nature of foods (environmental, economic, social, cultural, etc.): there is no one miracle food!

→ KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEPLOYMENT OF TARGETED FOOD FORTIFICATION STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE PREVENTION OF MALNUTRITION

Supporting the local private sector to integrate targeted food fortification while contributing, with the State, to the improvement of the regulatory, fiscal, economic, environmental and social environment, is one solution to reduce micronutrient deficiency and malnutrition. With a view to eliminating the numerous obstacles that remain, GRET has made some key recommendations to stakeholders in the various areas of nutrition and development:

Support local businesses to improve their technical and management skills, based on their needs and constraints

- Mobilise high-level formulation expertise, which local businesses often lack, to develop food formulas combining stringent quality requirements and nutritional objectives, affordable prices, strong appeal, and local production and supply.
- Support production, supply and quality control over the long term.
- Develop commercial capacities (promotion and distribution), governance, financial management and HR.

Prioritise balanced partnerships with committed local businesses

- Make sure the business and its governing bodies (health and nutritional quality, product pricing, production conditions, etc.) are socially responsible and have ethical integrity, as well as being profitable.
- Envisage partnerships/projects that are sufficiently long to co-construct the approach sustainably, in confidence with the business, and be more resilient when faced with risks of security, economic and social crises in intervention contexts.

Make the environment more favourable and incentivising

- Support the inclusion of food fortification and the local private sector in public nutrition policies; encourage the use of local targeted fortified foods in social safety net programmes.



NUTRI'ZAZA⁷, A MALAGASY SOCIAL BUSINESS MARKETING AFFORDABLE, QUALITY, FORTIFIED FOODS THAT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON INFANT FEEDING.

105 million meals distributed since its creation in 2013 by GRET and its partners, and today: 8,200 points of sale operating throughout Madagascar, 37 *hotelin-jazakely* (restaurants for babies) and some 40 organisations distributing 42,000 meals locally.



- Consolidate national regulatory frameworks, ensure they are understood, disseminated, and ensure they are appropriated by stakeholders; strengthen control of the private sector by the public sector regarding the health and nutritional quality of fortified foods, and marketing of foods for young children in particular⁸.
- Support the development of key agricultural value chains, the packaging value chain, and easier, sustainable supply of nutritional inputs (mineral and vitamin complements in particular), while supporting advocacy for their tax exemption.
- Support creation of demand and encourage the consumption of quality fortified foods by supporting social communication campaigns in tandem with commercial communication campaigns.
- Mobilise research more, to improve knowledge (micronutrient deficiencies, diets), continue to evaluate targeted food fortification approaches and their link to health, evaluate more specific, innovative approaches, in particular to favour upscaling.

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- 1 Allen L., Benoist de B., Dary O., Hurrell R. (Ed.) (2011), *Guidelines on food fortification with micronutrients*, WHO, FAO, 379 p.
- 2 The period from early pregnancy to the child's 2nd birthday.
- 3 The Lancet (2013), "Maternal and Child Nutrition – Executive Summary of *The Lancet* Maternal and Child Nutrition Series", 12 p.
- 4 Allen L., Benoist de B., Dary O., Hurrell R. (Ed.) (2011), *Guidelines on food fortification with micronutrients*, WHO, FAO, 379 p.
- 5 For example, fortification of potato chips or a sweet drink: although the product developed can be intrinsically balanced, promoting it would be akin to encouraging unhealthy food behaviours.
- 6 Learn more: Boule Martinaud C., Denizeau M. (re-ed.) (2024), *Définir un aliment « idéal » contribuant à prévenir la malnutrition : méthodologie et recommandations du projet Meriem en appui à des entreprises locales*, GRET, 4 p., Meriem Briefing note, n° 3.
- 7 For a presentation on Nutri'zaza, see: <https://nutrizaza.org>.
- 8 *International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes* issued by the WHO in 1981, and the various resolutions relating to it (in particular that of May 2016 on *Guidance on ending the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children – A69/7*).

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