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AFGHANISTAN FOOD FORTIFICATION PROJECT

OCTOBER 2015 – SEPTEMBER 2017

\$3.172 MILLION

OVERVIEW

In Afghanistan there is a severe vitamin and mineral deficiency problem. Known deficiencies include those of vitamin A, vitamin D, iron, folate and zinc. The 2013 National Nutrition Survey found the prevalence of vitamin A deficiency among children under 5 years of age to be 50% and among women of reproductive age to be 11%. Vitamin D deficiency was also found to be a severe problem with 64% of children and 65% of women affected. The same survey found that 14% of children and 14% of women of reproductive age suffered from iron deficiency anemia and 7% of adolescent girls had folate deficiency. Malnutrition is estimated to contribute to at least 45 percent of child deaths in Afghanistan and has serious ramifications on health and development at individual, community and societal levels.

The control and prevention of micronutrient deficiencies translate to substantial positive health benefits including: strengthened innate immune capacity, increased efficacy of treatment for illnesses, improved recovery and disease outcomes, significant reduction in birth defects and negative birth outcomes for women, and improvements in child survival. Conversely, poor health outcomes associated with micronutrient deficiencies translate into economic losses. The World Bank has estimated that countries may lose two to three percent of their Gross Domestic Product if they persist.

One of the most cost-efficient ways for addressing micronutrient inadequacies (i.e. insufficient intakes) and improving health outcomes is food fortification. Including essential vitamins and minerals in wheat flour, edible oils and salt is one way to improve the health and nutrition status of the Afghan population.

ACTIVITIES

- Strengthen the regulatory framework of food fortification, including provision of support for the harmonization of wheat flour fortification standards with those of neighboring countries,
- Strengthen the quality control system of the involved industries;
- Strengthen public sector enforcement mechanisms; and,
- Devise and test a practical and feasible system to monitor coverage, consumption and potential impact of fortified foods.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- A ground breaking cross border gathering of traders and key stakeholders including trader associations and representatives from relevant ministries from Afghanistan and Pakistan was held in Islamabad on May, 2016. Key recommendations include working more closely on harmonization of regional standards, establishing labeling requirements for exports to Afghanistan and the establishment of a traders committee to improve and enhance cross border trade of fortified foods.
- Organized and influenced several high-level advocacy meetings that led to decisions which are building the food fortification system in Afghanistan and raising awareness among key players. These have included:
 - Deliberations to define specific indicators for inclusion in the national surveillance system;
 - Deliberations on the NFA (National Fortification Alliance) board selection; and
 - Discussions with government officials on the content of a planned national advocacy roundtable.

Date: August 2016
Office: +93 (0) 700 11 4015
E-mail: kblaidocinformation@usaid.gov
Web: <http://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan>