



Flour Fortification Training Seminar for Millers - REPORT

1 April 2021 - Cairo, Egypt

Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel

The Flour Fortification Training Seminar for Millers was possible thanks to the support of Food Fortification Initiative (FFI) and its partners: Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade-Egypt (MOSIT), International Federation of Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and UNICEF.

BACKGROUND

In 2008, the Government of Egypt started a program to fortify the wheat flour used in subsidized baladi bread, a staple food consumed by a majority of Egypt's low-income population. Through this program, life-saving amounts of folic acid and iron reached approximately 50 million Egyptians. The program ended in 2011/2012 due to circumstances external to the project. Despite the halt in the project, the government of Egypt has remained supportive of the initiative.

Fortification of flour with iron and folic acid is an ideal intervention as Egypt consumes approximately 17 million tons of wheat per year, making it one of the largest consumers worldwide. Since bread is Egypt's main staple food and is consumed by the majority of the population, fortification of baladi bread through the subsidy system, with iron and folic acid, is an effective strategy to address two pressing public health problems: anemia and neural tube defects (NTDs). Mandatory flour fortification, which entails the fortification of both publicly and privately milled flour, will enable 90% of the Egyptian population, approximately 90 million people, to receive the vitamins and minerals they need to lead a more productive and healthier life. Flour fortification can significantly reduce the current prevalence of anemia, which is more than 20% in women and 27% in children under five, according to the latest Demographic Health Survey, and NTDs, which are three times higher than the global rate. Implementation of mandatory flour fortification on a national scale is a nutrition intervention that has the potential to significantly improve Egypt's health status and overall productivity at minimal cost and maximum impact.



In October 2018, the Government of Egypt launched *100 Million Healthy Lives*, an initiative that proposes solutions to address key chronic health issues in Egypt, including malnutrition. The government sought FFI's expertise in 2019 to restart Egypt's fortified baladi bread subsidy program and expand wheat flour fortification to the open market to address key health challenges such as anemia and NTDs.

FFI has provided technical support in Egypt since April 2019 through the following activities:

- Mapping the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead for flour fortification,
- Providing evidence-based recommendations for appropriate market channels to reach target populations,
- Drafting an implementation plan with the timeframe for a successful program,
- Conducting a comprehensive mill assessment that entailed a detailed outline of mill readiness to launch fortification,
- Developing a high-level advocacy documentary to showcase the significance of fortification as an intervention for improving the health and wellbeing of Egyptians, and
- Hosting the Flour Fortification Training Seminar for Millers to refresh and build capacity amongst millers for the flour fortification launch.

From planning to implementation to monitoring, FFI and the Government of Egypt are committed to the work of rebuilding a smarter, stronger, and healthier future for Egypt.

OBJECTIVES

The Flour Fortification Training Seminar for Millers held on 1 April 2021 had two main objectives.

- 1) Update and refresh miller knowledge on flour fortification.
- 2) Connect millers from the private and public sectors with key fortification stakeholders to jointly discuss next steps for flour fortification.



SEMINAR FORMAT

The event successfully achieved the objectives and brought together stakeholders that included MOSIT, Ministry of Health, National Nutrition Institute, National Food Safety Authority, millers from both the public and private sectors, The Food Holding Company, the American Chamber of Commerce, and USAID.

The event was an engaging and dynamic day full of interest, participation, and energy. It was a unique experience as it not only brought together the stakeholders, who, for many, were meeting for the first time in person, but also used a format that actively engaged participants. The Seminar employed several methods to communicate with and empower participants:

- 1) **Training modules:** Modules developed by Kansas State University (KSU) were translated and dubbed into Arabic to suit the audience's language preference.
- 2) **Quiz and voting system:** A quiz was held after each of the modules to test the overall participant knowledge. The responses were submitted through a voting system, where the results were displayed in a graphical format. This process generated discussion and engagement among participants.
- 3) **Zoom calls:** Live Zoom calls were held with representatives from FFI, IF, and the International Association for Operative Millers (IAOM) that engaged the participants directly and created a sense of project ownership among Egypt's fortification stakeholders.
- 4) **Certificates of Achievement:** Each of the participants received a Certificate of Achievement that recognized his/her effort at the Seminar and certified successful completion of the program.
- 5) **Giveaways:** Participants received a giveaway bag that included a branded note pad, a pen, a USB port containing the presentations and modules, as well as FFI communication materials.
- 6) **Media coverage:** The event was covered in both print and social media, which created momentum for flour fortification as a key intervention for Egypt's Vision 2030 and as part of the *100 Million Healthy Lives* initiative.



PARTICIPANTS

Ministry of Health: Minister's assistants

MOSIT: Minister's assistants

National Nutrition Institute: Team members with experience in milling and food fortification

Food Holding Company: CEO and team members

Millers: Wide representation from across the country of millers from the private and public sector. A sampling of the governorates represented include Cairo, Alexandria, Behera, Qena, Gharbia, Luxor, Menoufia, Ismailia, and Sharqia.

National Food Safety Authority: CEO Deputy and team members

International Agencies: GAIN, IF, UNICEF, and USAID

DISCUSSIONS & PRESENTATIONS

At the conclusion of the Seminar, participants were enthusiastic to help push the flour fortification project forward. The participants were impressed with the professionalism of the Seminar as well as the wealth of information that they received during modules, presentations, and discussions. One of the key strengths of the Seminar was that it brought together stakeholders from all sectors involved in fortification. It allowed them to meet with their counterparts, to see how their role fits within the overall flour fortification project, and to discuss their challenges, areas of concern, and next steps face-to-face. The forum's environment supported openness and encouraged new ideas and opinions. The participants left the Seminar with a better understanding of the significance of their work, beyond the mill and beyond their department, and their work's role in meeting the country's goals of a stronger and healthier future for all Egyptians. Areas covered in discussion included the effectiveness of flour fortification as a vehicle in the reduction of anemia; the impact of folic acid on the reduction of folic acid deficiency and NTDs; and the significance of regulatory and internal monitoring, quality management systems, and solid data to ensure the success of fortification projects. All discussions and presentations highlighted the role of the millers and the significance of their role to the success of flour fortification.

The Seminar had several presentations from stakeholders including a presentation from MOSIT, who reiterated their support and commitment to flour fortification as an integral strategy for the country and as a key intervention that has the capacity to reach the masses with enriched flour. The newly formed National Food Safety Authority shared an informative presentation that outlined the organization's role and their plans to work with key stakeholders to ensure that issues of monitoring, safety, and inspection would be addressed with stakeholder input. National Nutrition Institute team members discussed their role in the initial Egyptian flour



fortification program that took place 2008-2011/12 and their expertise and willingness to support the new phase of fortification. UNICEF's presentation highlighted the direct link between the success of flour fortification and reaching United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in relation to the reduction of anemia. IF's presentation demonstrated the impact of NTDs on newborns and its implications on an individual, community, and country. The presentation demonstrated how countries can significantly reduce the prevalence of NTDs through fortification of flour with folic acid, a relatively simple and cost-effective intervention. FFI updated the audience on progress the program has achieved to date and discussed the potential for fortified flour to reach 90% of the population. IAOM presented information on new, cutting-edge milling techniques. This was met with great interest, especially from the millers, as it introduced novel information and knowledge in milling.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Flour fortification is a timely, essential intervention that is needed for Egypt, especially in light of COVID-19—the frontlines of every country's health system are the immune systems of its people. Good nutrition helps boost the immune system, lowers the risk of becoming critically ill with infectious diseases, and supports faster recovery when infected. Furthermore, it was brought to the attention of the participants that fortification is an adaptable intervention well-suited for the social distancing requirements demanded by the COVID-19 pandemic: large-scale fortification does not require direct person-to-person contact to deliver micronutrients to beneficiaries.

The key message from the Seminar was that re-launching flour fortification in Egypt has tremendous potential to not only improve lives, health, and wellbeing; it also has the potential to bring the country closer to reaching policy objectives such as Vision 2030 and the *100 Million Healthy Lives*. The flour fortification project is an investment in Egypt's future—empowering Egyptians with a healthier tomorrow.

ACHIEVEMENTS & WAY FORWARD

- Holding companies to host training of trainers for all millers across Egypt. Roll out and plan under discussion.
- FFI to work with MOSIT and the Federation of Egyptian Industries for legislation for open market flour fortification.
- FFI/UNICEF to facilitate a high-level meeting between Ministry of Health and MOSIT to explore next steps for mandating flour fortification. This includes exploring options for



covering the cost for premix and preparations for the official launch of mandatory wheat flour fortification in Egypt.

- FFI to work with the National Food Safety Authority to finalize guidelines and to provide technical assistance for their implementation.
- FFI/UNICEF partnership to expand to include further technical assistance in capacity building and project implementation.
- AMCHAM to support future efforts of FFI through the organization's extended network of businesses contacts, leaders, and decision makers in Egypt.
- Discussions ongoing with USAID on potential involvement and partnership with FFI.
- Expansion of partnerships with new organizations that have expressed interest in this project as a result of the momentum built through the Seminar and media exposure.