



## Project News: Improving Food Security and Nutrition in the Gambia through Food Fortification

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### Project Background

Malnutrition in general and micronutrient deficiencies particularly remain prevalent in the Gambia. For example, the 2013 national Demographic Household Survey (DHS) found that 24.5 percent of children under five were stunted and 16 percent wasted. Anaemia also affected children under five years of age and women in reproductive age by 72 percent and 60 percent respectively.

Other than salt iodization, there was no food fortification in The Gambia. Related legislation regulations and protocols and yet to be developed. Technical and management capacity in all aspects of food fortification also needs to be strengthened.

This situation led to The EU-funded project, “Improving Food security and nutrition in the Gambia through food fortification”. The project comprises an integrated and cohesive set of actions designed to increase access to and consumption of micro-nutrient rich food by vulnerable women, adolescent girls and children in the country, thus improving their nutrition and health. The key vehicles selected to increase the availability of micro-nutrient rich foods to be supported by this action are wheat flour, oil, rice, and biofortified orange fleshed sweet potato, cassava and iron-rich cowpea.

Through the project initiatives, at least 65 percent of the Gambia’s population will increase their intake of micronutrients through the consumption of fortified flour as bread from the third year of the project onwards. For the most vulnerable communities in the North Bank Region and Central River Region with the highest rates of malnourishment, at least 20 000 women, adolescent girls and children under the age of five have increased access to biofortified crops.

In the pages that follow, we showcase some of the achievements and activities by the project through 2021.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- **When poetry and food come together!**
- **The Gambia’s Food Fortification Regulations launched**
- **SBCC Step down training to promote consumption of fortified food**
- **Rapid Food Consumption Survey**
- **Support towards production and consumption of fortified foods.**

## When poetry and food come together!



The Governor of URR, Mr. Samba Bah handing over certificates to the participants of the poetry competition

On 16th October 2021, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in partnership with various nutrition stakeholders celebrated World Food Day in Basse of Upper River Region (URR).

In this regard, the project organized a poetry contest among five schools in URR to provide opportunities to engage the younger generation so that they can make informed decisions and be advocates for change. Ten participants took part in the contest, including two students from each school.

*“The project’s aim to improve healthy diets and communication is very important,” FAO Nutrition Officer Solange Heise said in her statement. “We also targeted the students so that they can send important messages related to nutrition through poetry to their fellow students. Moreover, successful agriculture generally has to start from the grassroots”.*

2021’s World Food Day’s action-oriented campaign focused on raising awareness of the need to support the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life as well as the UN’s cause of leaving no one behind. After 10 poems were submitted, the jury sat on the 15th of October to select the winner of the poetry contest. The best poems came from Nasir Senior Secondary School. Students Mainuna Minteh and Fatoumatta Krubally represented the school and recited the winning poem. All participants were presented with a certificate, a school bag and a project T-shirt.

*“I just want to say a big thank you to FAO for allowing me to advocate for healthy local diets through poetry,” said Fatoumatta, one of the winners. “And I just want to tell my fellow students not to ever feel shy to participate in events like these because just coming out with a single poem can make a huge impact for many people who do not know much about food and health”.*

## The Gambia’s Food Fortification regulations launched



Dr. Isatou Touray, Vice President of the Gambia with two other cabinet Ministers, WFP and FAO Reps & other stakeholders pose for a picture

One of the prime focuses of the project is enhancing the fight against the high rate of hidden hunger (micronutrients deficiencies) in the Gambia. And this theme received a huge boost on 7 July 2021 with the launch of Food Fortification Regulations targeting three highly consumed foods in the Gambia.

The Food Fortification Regulations 2020 provide the necessary legal authority and a Regulatory Framework to implement an effective food fortification programme for better nutrition.

The Food Safety and Quality Authority (FSQA) under the Office of the Vice President developed the regulations that are based on national and international standards through a participatory stakeholder consultative process supported through the fortification project.

The regulations were published in the Government’s Gazette 2020 and thus it is now mandatory for importers and manufacturers of wheat flour, salt and edible fats and oils to ensure that these products are fortified with adequate levels of specified minerals and vitamins. The project provided the only two wheat flour production companies namely Gambia Milling Cooperation and Nessim Flour Mill with 3000 kg of these items.

The integrated initiative aims to contribute towards the reinforcement of the regulatory systems and promote

public-private partnerships in food fortification for the elimination of malnutrition in all its forms, leaving no one behind.

Her Excellency Dr. Isatou Touray, Vice President of the Republic of the Gambia presided over the launching on behalf of President Adama Barrow at a ceremony held at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre.

In his launching statement read by Her Excellency Vice President Touray, His Excellency President Adama Barrow outlined the importance of the regulations towards the attainment of optimal public health and sustainable socio-economic growth and development emphasizing “we are what we eat”.

The President’s Statement called on producers, manufacturers, importers and distributors of wheat flour, edible oil, and salt to comply with the regulations to improve the micronutrient status of the Gambian population and by extension, protect the health of the consumers. He assured the public of the Government’s support for the effective enforcement of the regulations.

*“I am equally urging consumers of these foods to demand safe and nutritious food by making informed choices. I wish to take this opportunity to encourage the media to disseminate information on food safety, quality, and nutrition to all stakeholders, to facilitate behavioural change among our population for a better health outcome,” the president said.*

## SBCC Step down training to promote consumption of fortified food



Beneficiaries from various community structures engaged in a learning session.

FAO supported a series of step down training sessions through the Directorate of Health Promotion and Education under the MoH where beneficiaries from various community structures learnt the importance of

consumption of fortified and biofortified foods in the Gambia.

Aimed at improving food security, nutrition and health of vulnerable women and children as well as to help reduce malnutrition and diet-related diseases in the Gambia, a total of 1375 people from various regions of the country learnt on related topics. The sessions were conducted by public health officers, nurses and field officers and were held in different batches over August and September with participants coming from members of village support groups, village development committees, traditional communicators, mothers clubs and farmer field schools among others.

*“The training sessions have opened our eyes to various nutrition-related facts that would help us choose healthy and diverse items on our daily diets,” Fatou Njie, a participant from the North Bank Region said. “We now know about micronutrient compositions of food and the importance of food fortification and the consequences of micronutrient deficiencies. We were also taught how to visually identify vitamin A-rich foods and we learnt the benefits of eating such foods.”*

During the sessions, participants were asked to identify through pictures, several African leafy vegetables as well as iron-rich foods and they were informed where to get them from. Other topics included iodine-rich foods and the importance, and benefits of using iodized salt.

In many of the sessions participating groups composed songs about the importance of eating fortified foods while highlighting some examples of such items. Short dramas on the theme of micronutrients and dietary diversification were also showcased in some of the sites.

## First National Food Consumption Survey

FAO supported the undertaking of the first National Food Consumption Survey that aimed to rapidly establish average intake levels of wheat flour, rice, and bio-fortified pearl millet, biofortified maize, Orange fleshed sweet potato, cowpeas, biofortified cassava, vegetable oil, fruits, and vegetables as well as the frequency of consumption among children aged 6 – 23 months and 24 – 59 months as well as Women of Reproductive Age.

The survey was conducted under the leadership of the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) in collaboration with the Gambia Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Health, FSQA, National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), FTS, Medical Research Council (MRC), and the United Purpose.



FAO supported a rapid survey to find the food consumption patterns

Taking a capacity-building approach, FAO supported training sessions for the survey technical committee who led the data collection process and key survey personnel involved in the activity.

Using questionnaires developed in consultation with stakeholders, information and samples were collected from 164 enumeration areas and 1312 households. Fifty-two of these enumeration areas were drawn from FAO and United Purpose Interventions sites.

*“The survey takes a national approach and will help generate important data at a national level that will have implications at the policy level,” said Halimatou Bah, the Project Lead. “Through the survey, we will get information on the generic food consumption habits that will inform the need for behaviour change while addressing the needs of the World Health Targets and Agenda 2030 on sustainable development goals”*

## Support towards production and consumption of fortified food

FAO provided increased support towards large scale production and consumption of fortified food and bio-fortified crops during the 2021 cropping season. As part of its seed purity maintenance activity, NARI through FAO, supported the planting of 25 kg of Pro-vitamin A maize in one-hectare land in Mamut Fana and Yundum.

*With the funding support of the European Union and the technical support of the Government of the Gambia*



To support these activities, 1100 kg of NPK 6:20:10; 400 kg of NPK 15:15:15 and 400 kg of Urea, two wheelbarrows, two tarpaulins, 1 cowpea seeder, a power tiller and two 50-meter long hose pipes and nose masks were procured and handed over to NARI. Similarly, the Department of Agriculture distributed 5000 OFSP vines, 5560 kg of Pro-Vitamin A maize and 62 kg of iron-rich cowpeas for large scale production and consumption in the West Coast region. Furthermore, 5400 kg of NPK 15:15:15, 1100 kg of NPK 6:20:20, and 2900 kg of Urea were distributed to farmers as part of the effort to increase the production of biofortified crops.

Following the registration of the biofortified Pro-Vitamin A, 13 maize varieties are now considered for commercial seed production.

Thus, the project in collaboration with NSS during the 2021 cropping season distributed 630 kg of foundation seeds amongst 33 certified seed growers in the project target regions for the production of certified seeds. This will enhance the availability of substantive quantities of certified Pro-Vitamin A 13 maize seeds by farmers.

Furthermore, 20 tarpaulins and 2 corn shelling machines, 5000 kg of NPK and 2500 kg of Urea were procured and distributed amongst the 33 certified seed growers to enhance the production of quality certified seeds.

The project also provided the victims of the 2021 windstorm in Noth Bank Region with 700 bags of Urea fertilizer to support the production of bio-fortified crops.

On the other hand, as part of the livestock component of the project that aims to promote short cycle livestock and poultry in target communities, the project supported 100 beneficiaries (including 78 females) from the most food-insecure communities within the project intervention areas with small ruminants, i.e. one male and three female goats each. Additionally, the project procured 2500 broilers and 2000 layers for six community poultry houses in three project regions.

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