

Can the private sector tackle undernutrition amongst the world's poorest people?

Undernutrition is the biggest worldwide health risk

45% Undernutrition accounts for roughly 45% of child deaths globally.¹

An estimated 250,000 to 500,000 vitamin A-deficient children become blind every year, half of them dying within 12 months of losing their sight.²

2 billion

"Hidden hunger" or deficiency in vitamins and minerals (micronutrients) affects to 2 billion people in the world.³

25% In Nigeria, vitamin deficiency has contributed to 25% child and maternal deaths nationally.⁴

African countries are losing the equivalent of between 1.9% to 16.5% of their GDP annually, as a result of child undernutrition.⁵

Tackling malnutrition through market-based solutions often fails to reach the poorest people

MANDATORY AND LARGE-SCALE FORTIFICATION

Mandatory fortification of basic foods such as cooking oil and flour is seen as one cost-effective approach to addressing chronic vitamin and mineral deficiencies, especially amongst the poorest. Making it mandatory aims to circumvent low demand and competition from lower cost, unfortified products.

This approach relies on a value chain involving producers, processors, retailers and consumers.



OUR RESEARCH unearthed why and how a value chain approach to fortification can break down, resulting in nutritious food not reaching the poorest people.

PROBLEMS WITH COMPLIANCE

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) often lack the skills, resources and regulatory incentives to comply.

Competition from non-compliant MSMEs means large companies may underdose products or simply sell at a premium price to wealthy consumers.

Government or statutory agencies have low regulatory capacity and little access to food testing technologies.

Poor and rural households mostly buy their foods from micro, small or medium enterprises



FORTIFIED

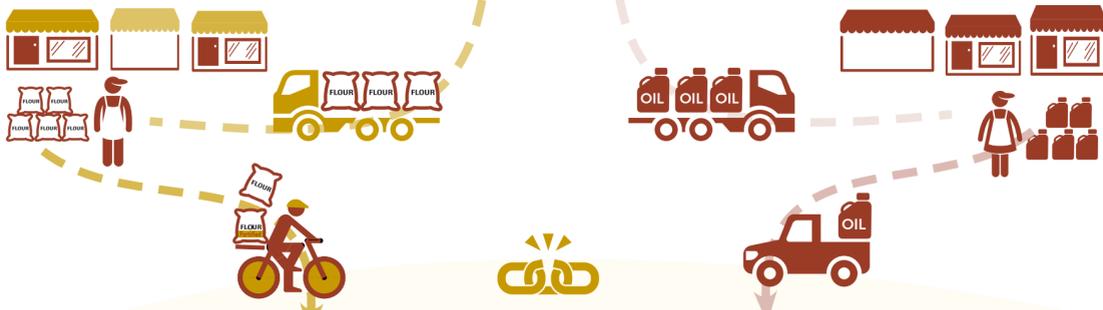
FLOUR

There is no visible difference between fortified and unfortified flour, so the nutritional value (and additional cost) of fortified flour must be taken on trust.



COOKING OIL

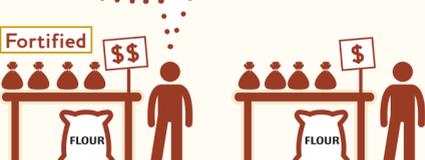
Value chains are not structured to pass on incentives, for example, around improved storage technologies. Poor storage can lead to a breakdown of micronutrients, for example, Vitamin A deteriorates when exposed to sunlight.



INFORMAL MARKET

Regulating informal activities is notoriously difficult

"My flour includes special nutrients that make it healthier for your children"



Products sold or decanted into small packages to make them more affordable



The impact of poor nutrition early in life has lasting effects that can transcend generations

"How do I know if this flour is better for my children? It doesn't look any different to the cheaper flour..."

"I can't afford to buy fuel to cook so these snacks will have to do"



4 APPROACHES to complement market-orientated interventions for getting nutritious foods to poor people

UNDERTAKE RESEARCH on how poor households source food and strengthen national statistics agencies to generate more accurate data on whether and how specific groups are being reached by nutritious foods.

SUPPORT EFFORTS to increase the capacity of government to enforce regulations in the long-term while improving information available to consumers in the short term, e.g. through certification or franchising.

RECOGNISE formal-informal linkages in food systems to better understand challenges around the poorest accessing nutritious foods as well as potential innovations to increase access.

REACHING POOREST and most marginalised households through public sector programmes such as social safety nets, food distribution and support for farming remains crucial.

FIND OUT MORE: www.ids.ac.uk/marketsandnutrition



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The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

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