

Welcoming Remarks

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Distinguished experts from the country teams, guests from the multinational agencies and food companies, ladies, and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to welcome you to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for this important discussion on food fortification policy. A key theme of this meeting is the question of how the private and public sectors can work together to eliminate serious nutritional problems in Asia and the Pacific. The subject is close to our hearts here at ADB because the overarching strategic objective of ADB is to reduce poverty in a sustainable manner. Malnutrition is the most telling aspect of poverty and its scars ravage life's prospects. We are convinced that both the public and private sectors have a major role to play in bringing affordable, high-quality diets to everyone, in particular to the poor.

Micronutrient malnutrition is especially tricky because it is a kind of "hidden hunger" that can easily go unrecognized. However, its consequences for vulnerable groups, particularly poor women and children, and the work force are devastating. I understand that Christine Wallich, ADB's head of private sector operations, may later suggest a way forward that will revitalize the fortified food sector in the region. Let me first briefly reflect on the challenges that you have assembled to address.

I am very pleased to see that key stakeholders are represented at this meeting. I hope that the representatives of the food industry will enlighten us on, among other issues, how widely consumed staples can be fortified and how the practice may become widespread. The public health regulators will hopefully share their experiences on how governments can create an enabling environment for the private sector while protecting the rights and needs of citizens. Experts on trade and consumer needs have been invited to enrich the discussion, to ensure that the technologies proposed are feasible, and that true nutritional needs are being met. And I hope that our United Nations partners will also share their valuable experience with us.

You are all welcome and we look forward to learning from you.

ADB also warmly welcomes the cosponsorship of this event by the Micronutrient Initiative and the International Life Sciences Institute. We know these institutions well, as global advocates for the application of food science and technology to enhance the physical, social, and economic well-being of humanity. Through their help, and that of other key partners like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, I hope that we will be able to assess the technical requirements of both the public and private sectors, and identify institutional and investment gaps that the donor community may fill.

ADB places great significance on candid and open dialogue with stakeholders. We recognize that ADB can do a great deal more to cooperate closely with the private sector, especially in critical areas like nutrition, where human development is at stake. Our experience is limited and needs to be

broadened. I hope you agree with me that this meeting should focus on key policy and program questions that will guide concerted action later. We all have much to learn about the processes that will lead to successful elimination of malnutrition.

No single meeting can cover fully the issues that need to be addressed. Following this meeting, ADB will—with your help—organize a detailed regional assessment over the next year for possible donor financing and private-sector investment. But first we must agree on key solutions on where we are headed and the way forward. This meeting marks an important first step on the path to eradicating this preventable affliction: micronutrient malnutrition.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.