

After the Manila Forum: ADB and Partners Lead a Regional Initiative to Fortify Essential Foods for the Poor

The Manila Forum has highlighted a number of dramatic successes in food fortification to overcome micronutrient malnutrition in western and Asian countries. A common element has been involvement of public and private sectors acting in partnership. Governments have worked successfully with the private sector in raising production and consumption of iodized salt, which currently reaches two thirds of Asian households. Now the lessons learned must be applied to other staples and fortificants. Progress in reaching populations in Asia with such other crucial micronutrients as iron and Vitamin A has been modest to date, and the overall reach of fortified foods in the region is still extremely small.

Based on the consensus reached at this Forum, ADB will conduct a regional initiative (2001-2002), in partnership with Danish International Development Assistance (Danida) and ILSI, to prepare an assessment of the requirements for modernizing the food industry in Asia so that fortified, widely consumed food products will be accessible and affordable, especially to the poor.

The People's Republic of China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand, and Viet Nam will participate in a series of regional fora and in assessing their investment requirements to fortify essential foods. These countries have a demonstrated commitment to resolving substantial micronutrient problems through strong macroeconomic planning and a commitment to capacity building in the public and private sectors for taking rapid and effective corrective actions.

The ultimate objective of the regional initiative is to rapidly expand the production and reach of fortified foods widely consumed by the poor in Asia. The immediate objectives are to (i) accelerate production of micronutrient-fortified foods; (ii) strengthen the regional knowledge base on food technology, regulation, trade, and surveillance; (iii) create a framework for regional fortification of certain essential staples; (iv) raise awareness of fortified foods among the poor; (v) link fortification policies and programs to poverty reduction; and (vi) develop country investment plans (CIPs) to mobilize external resources.

The initiative will support two main activities. First, it will assist the countries in developing medium-term CIPs based on feasibility studies of the public and private sectors. At the ADB Annual Meeting in Shanghai in 2002, the CIPs will be assessed by governments, funding agencies, and philanthropic institutions for resource mobilization and joint planning to take corrective actions at the country level. Second, it will sponsor a number of regional meetings to increase knowledge of best practices and build capacity in the region. Other activities include preparation of an investor's primer and a website so that technical assistance data, reports, and workshop proceedings can be rapidly accessed. ILSI will also lead a regional dialogue on the prospects for establishing a science-based regional resource center for food-quality testing, laboratory science, and research and training on food technology and fortification.

