



Major step towards staple food fortification

Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia, founder and Chairman of the Namibia Alliance for Improved Nutrition (NAFIN), Mr Nahas Angula, addressed commercial millers, including small-scale commercial millers in Ongewdiva on the importance of fortifying processed grain with micronutrients in order to foster a healthier population. The millers were gathered during a workshop on the food fortification process, organised by the Namibian Agronomic Board (NAB). Adding micronutrients to processed grain and cereals to enrich the nutritional quality of food is standard practice around the world and helps to promote public health. In countries such as Namibia, the practice is not yet compulsory even though some of the bigger milling operations have been fortifying their meal and flour on a voluntary basis for some time.



Nahas Angula, Founder and Chariman of NAFIN addressed millers of Mahangu and White Maize at a gathering in Ongwediva recently.

In recent months, the NAB spearheaded an initiative to broaden the practice of fortifying milled mahangu and white maize meal as well as wheaten flour with micronutrients. Once a predetermined ratio of micronutrient cocktail is added to the milled product, the commodity that is sold to the public is significantly increased in nutritional value and has the potential of mitigating avoidable illnesses such as stunted growth and wasting. The initiative, which has support from various stakeholders, especially NAFIN, has progressed to the stage where the NAB has passed a resolution stipulating that by 1 April 2017, food fortification will be a licence requirement for all millers who supply milled grain to the general public.

Mr Angula began his address to the millers by saying, "In my capacity as a civic citizen, I am concerned about the nutritional status especially of children under the age of five." He went on to say, "I became aware of this challenge when I was Prime Minister. In 2007, our National Planning Commission showed in a review where Namibia stood with regard to meeting the Millennium Development Goals at the time. One of those goals dealt with infant mortality rates. To our shock, we discovered that the infant mortality rate in Namibia was very high." At the time, the report revealed that the infant mortality rate stood at 1 in 3 for children under the age of five years. The report prompted a countrywide survey to ascertain the lead causes of this high mortality rate in young children.

Under-nutrition and malnutrition in the Namibian population indicated not just a lack of adequate food intake to support growth, but also an inadequate intake of vitamins and minerals especially where new-borns and infants were not breastfed. An aspect of infant and child mortality that Angula highlighted in his address is the symptom of anaemia in pregnant women and how malnutrition in babies starts during gestation. Malnutrition then, is a cycle that starts with expecting mothers who are anaemic and perpetuates with their infants who are born underweight and unable to thrive. In such instances, the mother is unable to breastfeed because she is unable to either produce milk or is unable to produce milk that has a high nutritional value, leaving the ever present threat of opportunistic diseases to take hold and premature mortality highly likely in the very young.

Not only is the physical development of children in jeopardy, but cognitive development is also badly affected, leading to poor academic performance throughout their schooling and learning problems throughout the rest of their lives. According to the latest statistics, the highest rates of stunting appears in the Ohangwena, Hardap, Oshikoto and Omaheke regions, where up to 37% of children under the age of five years have the condition, while in Omaheke, Oshikoto, Kavango, Erongo and !Karas regions record the highest rates of wasting. The Oshikoto, Hardap, Omaheke and Ohangwena Regions record the highest number of children under the age of five who are underweight.

Fortifying staple foods with the addition of vitamins such as vitamin A, the full range of B vitamins and minerals such as Zinc and Iron mitigate problems such as poor eye health, heart disorders, weak muscles, a weak immune system, hair loss, dizziness and tiredness. Angula concluded his address by reiterating that processors of grain have a vital role to play in the health of the population by saying, "We must reduce stunting, wastage, underweight and overweight problems through good nutrition."

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