

# Strategic Alliance

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SAFO – Strategic Alliance for the Fortification of Oil and Other Staple Foods



## Vitamins against blindness

»Is it starting again? María's\* anxiety is growing. It is clear that her son José has trouble finding his way around in the semi-darkness. The three-year-old repeatedly bumps into the few objects that furnish the unlit hut; he looks around, searching for his mother. By day he blinks frequently and constantly rubs his eyes. This is just how it started with Ana. As time went on María's eldest daughter found it increasingly difficult to see by day; then a year ago she became completely blind. In addition, all four children of the Luz family are small for their age and sickly. And since the birth of her youngest daughter María herself has felt weak. Each day she finds it more and more difficult to summon up the energy for her work as a dressmaker. But because her husband cannot find work, she must force herself to do it, so that she can at least buy rice and flour. It is a long time since the family has been able to afford anything else to eat.«

### Nutrient deficiency – a global problem

Some two billion people around the world suffer, like María's family, from nutrient deficiency. Children are particularly severely affected. Every year around one million children die of undernourishment. In developing countries 40 per cent of all under-fives suffer from vitamin A deficiency – a total of 250 million pre-school children worldwide. The consequences include a weakened immune system, irreversible blindness, and death. Between 250,000 and 500,000 children die within a year of losing their sight. Vitamin A deficiency also occurs in adults. It is one of the main causes of maternal mortality, claiming around 50,000 lives per year in developing countries.

\* All persons are fictional.

Vitamin A is found naturally in most varieties of fruit and vegetables, in liver and in dairy products. In industrialised countries it is thus readily available. In the poorer regions of the world, however, the foods that contain vitamin A are often in short supply, as well as being unaffordable for those who need them. Like María's family, most people in these regions subsist almost entirely on flour, rice, maize, sugar and cooking oil – foods that supply the body with energy but not with sufficient nutrients.

### Three solutions

There are three ways of tackling nutrient deficiency: through diversification, supplementation, or fortification.

**Diversification**, particularly through growing a wide range of foods, is a long-term strategy. The aim is to ensure the availability of, and access to, foods with a high micro-nutrient content. In addition to ensuring availability, projects undertake educational programmes to encourage people to change their consumption habits.

**Supplementation** is usually a short-term, selective intervention strategy. It involves giving micronutrients in highly concentrated form – such as capsules – to particularly at-risk groups, such as children, pregnant women, the elderly, refugees and victims of famine. Good planning and organisation are essential if supplementation is to be successful.

**Fortification** is a highly effective approach in the medium term. It involves enriching foods with key nutrients. Fortification is applied to staple foods that are consumed regularly by poor people throughout the year. A familiar example of fortification is the iodisation of salt that is standard practice in Germany.

## Everyone benefits with SAFO

As part of the develoPPP.de programme, which is financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), a strategic alliance has been launched between BASF, the world's largest chemical company, and a leading vitamin producer. The aim of this cooperative venture (Strategic Alliance for the Fortification of Oil and Other Staple Foods – SAFO) is to provide people such as María and her children with low-cost foods that are fortified with vitamin A.



After initial surveys and preparatory workshops (in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Indonesia, Cambodia, Tanzania and elsewhere), BASF supplies local food producers with the necessary vitamin fortification equipment and supports them in the pilot phase. Viable business models that ensure that fortified staple foods reach the appropriate target group are developed with dealers and producers. In addition, BASF supplies mobile laboratory equipment for monitoring vitamin A content and for long-term quality assurance purposes. The project partners work with the competent authorities in drawing



up the legal framework, which may for example include regulations on quality labelling schemes that help to foster confidence. The fortified foods nevertheless remain affordable for consumers: for example, fortifying cooking oil raises the selling price by only about 0.2–0.3%. Since many people like María are unaware of the importance of a balanced and nutrient-rich diet, information campaigns are part of the project.

SAFO plans to reach several million people by the end of 2010, with the cooperation benefiting everyone involved. BASF develops new markets, local producers receive support and the economy of partner countries is boosted. At low cost the mortality rate among children and pregnant women is reduced and general levels of health and capacity for work improve. And most importantly of all, children such as José and Ana receive help before they lose their sight for ever.

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For more information see: [www.develoPPP.de](http://www.develoPPP.de)

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