Entry No. IRRC-0619

Category	: International Rice Research Conference
Select Theme	: Pathways to health and nutrition
Endorsement email	:
Keyword 1	: Nutrition security
Keyword 2	: Nutrient-dense rice
Keyword 3	: Novel nutrition products
Title of Entry	: Feasibility of making rice more nutritious for school children in Mali
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Select only one type of presentation	: 15 minute oral presentation
Abstract	: Deficiencies of micronutrients are a major global health problem. Micronutrient deficiencies increase the general risk of infectious illness and of dying. Mali is characterized by high rates of acute and chronic malnutrition and high prevalence of anaemia in vulnerable populations. Furthermore, it has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. Providing school meals is a social protection programme that provides multiple benefits. It provides a strong incentive to send and keep children in schools. The School Meals Programme in Mali is implemented by the Ministry of Nationa Education. To make meals more nutritious, WFP aimed to test whether fortification of locally produced rice is feasible operationally and programmatically (acceptance) in a West African context. In this pilot project, fortified kernels were imported from Thailand and blended with local rice, sourced and blended by Malô. Since July 2017, 1,500MT of rice were fortified with 8 vitamins and minerals and distributed to all 596 schools supported by WFP. The project reached more than 118,000 school kids aged 6 to 12 years with 150g of fortified rice per day. Nutritional content of the rice represented between 37% and 100% of daily requirements for this age group. Preliminary results indicate that it is technically feasible to blend fortified kernels with local rice and that no significant differences were observed by users once when blended and cooked. Focus group discussions (one with canteen management committees, parents and cooks, and another with students) revealed that including fortified rice in the school meals program is favourably perceived. No problems were found with preparation and children “appreciated” the taste. Parents and teachers reported a decline in illness, which they attribute to the fortified rice. The biggest challenge was related to communications about the fortified rice at all levels. Further analysis is required on the cost-effectiveness as locally produced rice can be more expensive than imported rice and this test was not designed to provide impact data. In conclusion, the fortification of locally-produced rice for school meals in Mali is feasible using imported fortified kernels. To assess the feasibility of scaling up, further analysis is required.

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