

# IICA Delegation in Jamaica World Food Day Remarks

A Day of Action Contributing Towards the Eradication of World Hunger

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Kingston, September 16, 2020: What a year 2020 has been, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic affecting all facets of our lives! However, we must continue to thrive to achieve the theme for 2020 World Food Day and continue to “Grow, Nourish, Sustain. Together Our Actions are Our Future.”

As a species, human beings can achieve incredible feats such as leaving our planet to visit the moon, exploring another planet, Saturn, or the depths of our oceans on our world, yet we're challenged by food and nutrition security. When all individuals have reliable access to sufficient quantities of affordable, nutritious food to lead a healthy life that will be an achievement!

This is THE challenge that must be embraced by each and everyone from diplomatic, political, private and public sectors to achieve this goal. Let's all continue to work together to make the change from actions to Eradicate hunger to celebrations of the Eradication of hunger! Now more than ever strengthening alliances and team work to achieve this goal is needed as we experience daily the phenomenon of spontaneous evolution as COVID-19 changes life as we know it. Amazingly 2020 might become that pivotal time in history as we talk of a time before covid and after covid. As in all times of monumental change in our history, our survival has depended and will continue to depend upon our ability to adapt or yes, that terrible word “change”. While this pandemic will drive spurts of innovation and development as we adapt, it

is also bringing together two major challenges that of health and food and nutrition security.

One of the most insidious forms of hunger is the lack or insufficient amounts of the vitamins and minerals our bodies need daily to properly function, which is known as hidden hunger. Why hidden, because people can be eating meals, but they are not being properly nourished. While our bodies need some 13 vitamins and 16 minerals known as essential to sustain life, deficiencies of 4 in particular, iron, zinc, Vitamins A and B9 (folate) are amongst the most severe.

Insufficient intake of these 4 vitamins and minerals can have detrimental impacts to health and quality of life ranging from low Testosterone in men, maternal deaths, stunted growth and cognitive development in children and youth as well as the development of non-communicable diseases in adulthood.

Heart disease, diabetes, Anemia, chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma and obesity are among the main causes of loss of quality of life and productivity in CARICOM. These non-communicable diseases are also responsible for 81% of premature deaths in CARICOM, the highest rate in all the Americas.

## FORTIFYING THE CARIBBEAN



This pandemic will drive innovation and development, and also bring together two major challenges: health with food and nutrition security.

Hidden hunger is the lack or insufficient amounts of the vitamins and minerals our bodies need daily to properly function, contributing to ill health, including non-communicable diseases.

**What if we can grow crops which naturally contain more iron and zinc? What if these crops were staples that we eat almost every day such as rice and beans?**

IICA has joined forces in the fight against hidden hunger by bringing agricultural innovation to address the problem of iron and zinc deficiencies in our region.

*Picture above: Zinc biofortified rice trial in Guyana  
Photo by: CARICOM Biofortification Network Partner, the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB)*

IICA has therefore joined forces in the fight against hidden hunger by bringing agricultural innovation to address the problem of iron and zinc deficiencies which is most prevalent in our region. What if we can grow crops which naturally contain more iron and zinc? What if these crops were staples that we eat almost every day such as rice and beans?

Such mineral enriched rice and beans do exist, and they are among a large number of what are known as biofortified crops addressing hidden hunger around the world. It has been shown in Africa that a population replacing half of its bean intake with iron biofortified beans reduced iron deficiency related conditions, such as Anemia, by as much as 30%. Why, because Biofortified staples, such as Iron biofortified beans and zinc biofortified rice can provide about 15% to 40% of the daily requirement for these minerals.

IICA has been given the mandate by the our highest decision making body the Council of Trade and Economic Development (COTED) of CARICOM to lead a collaborative team of specialists from regional and international agencies, collectively known as the CARICOM Biofortification Network, to develop varieties of iron biofortified beans and zinc biofortified rice for production in Belize and Guyana, respectively for the entire region. All CARICOM member states will benefit as they consume these staple crops that are normally imported from Belize and Guyana. The biofortification innovation of agriculture makes nourishing foods accessible to All with affordable staples such as zinc rich rice and iron rich beans.

In an era of COVID-19, the combination of the coronavirus and non-communicable diseases is proving to be deadly. IICA is therefore proud to work with our partners in the eradication of hunger in all forms as we Grow, Nourish, Sustain. So that Together Our actions make a healthier future."

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