

Rwanda to export fortified foods

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Rwanda will start exporting fortified foods, next month, thanks to a new modern factory launched last week Thursday. The Africa Improved Foods - Rwanda, based at Kigali Special Economic Zone Nyandungu, started production of fortified porridge last week.



Image by Faustin Nyigana via *New Times*

The \$45-million factory is expected to produce 45,000 tonnes of fortified food annually, enough to help boost exports and prevent child malnutrition across the country. Up to 60 percent of its output is expected to be exported to regional and global markets.

The facility is a consortium of Royal DSM (the global Life Sciences and Materials Sciences Company), the Dutch Development Bank, the DFID, the UK's development financing institution under the Impact Acceleration Facility (managed by CDC Group Plc), and the International Finance Corporation, the investment arm of the World Bank.

1000 Days campaign

In 2013, Rwanda launched the '1000 Days' national campaign to combat malnutrition with an aim of improving maternal and child health in the country. The campaign has been scientifically proven that the 1,000-day window has a profound impact on a child's ability to grow, learn and thrive.

Two years later, the government entered into a joint venture with private partners to invest in this high-tech facility to scale up production of fortified foods in the country. The objective of the venture, according to Prosper Ndayiragije, the country director of AIF Rwanda, is to improve the nutritional status of Rwandan population and help address malnutrition by manufacturing international quality fortified complementary foods for vulnerable groups.

"The AIF Group produces fortified blended foods for the Government of Rwanda and the World Food Programme (WFP) to help address malnutrition and stunting in children," Ndayiragije said, adding that with the facility, Rwanda will be able to address malnutrition among vulnerable population segments such as pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and children.

Besides the government of Rwanda, we are also supplying other clients like the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to help facilitate an efficient response to food emergencies in East Africa, he added. Ndayiragije said the plant intends to reach more than one million people this year alone, creating over 300 direct jobs and working with over 9,000 local farmers in the process.

The 2010 Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey results showed that chronic malnutrition affects 38 per cent of children under the age of five years, resulting in stunting.

With the new production facility, the problem could be tackled faster than was earlier anticipated, he added.

Reducing import bill

Meanwhile, experts believe the new facility will greatly reduce the country's import bill, thus narrowing trade deficit gap. For example, besides animal feeds, Rwanda currently imports about 30,000 tonnes of edible oil estimated at \$42 million.

The AIF Rwanda is inspired by solid evidence that the first 1,000 days, including conception to the second birthday, are critical for a child's physical and mental development, therefore, we expect the new plant to further boost nutrition in the country, said, Bernard Banamwana, the senior relations manager of AIF Rwanda.

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