

A no-brainer

“THE food and financial crises have refocused the world on how we deal with nearly 1 billion people who go to bed hungry.” So spoke Tadataka Yamada, head of global health at the Gates Foundation, a charity. But his listeners, a gathering of nutrition wonks in Bangkok earlier this month, did not focus on the hungry, in the usual sense of people whose intake of calories is low. Instead they tackled a problem that is far larger, but possibly simpler.

Perhaps a third of the world’s people suffer from a lack of micronutrients, substances that help bodies and brains to grow and resist disease. Micronutrients include vitamins and minerals like folic acid, iron, vitamin D and iodine (which, for example, affects the thyroid, intelligence and the action of genes).

The case for enriching staples such as flour or salt with micronutrients is compelling, says David Dodson of Project Healthy Children, an American charity. Adding iron to food costs less than ten cents a head per year, and the economic return (in productivity) might be 36 times as much; adding folic acid to diets costs four or five cents per head per year, with a payback of perhaps 120-fold.

So why, for example, is all salt not iodised? Partly, for lack of expertise in poor countries. But shamefully, the problem also reflects disarray among donors and squabbles among pundits.

The time is now ripe to correct this, says Meera Shekar of the World Bank. At next year’s G20 meeting in Canada, expect news of a big, co-ordinated global campaign, like the one against malaria.

The Economist, 2009

Tekst 11 A no-brainer

- 1p 41 Which of the following could function as a subheading to “A no-brainer”?
- A Absence of micronutrients causes huge but solvable problem
 - B Disagreement among donor countries at the root of food crisis
 - C Micronutrients crucial in providing the hungry with much needed calories
 - D Solving nutrition problem key to solving global financial crisis

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.