# Rice and Nutrition: A Challenge for Africa

In Africa, behind every statistic lies a face, a family, a story. Malnutrition is not just about numbers: it is the child who grows too small for their age, the mother who lacks the energy to work, or the community that struggles to thrive due to inadequate nutrition. According to the 2025 United Nations report on food security (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO)[1], nearly 700 million people worldwide are suffering from chronic malnutrition, and Africa bears an increasing share of this burden. Without decisive action, the continent could host 60% of the world's undernourished population by 2030.

But history is not fixed. Africa, through its energy and creativity, is exploring new solutions. Among them, one innovation stands out: transforming rice, the daily staple of millions of families, into a source of essential micronutrients—turning a fragility into an opportunity for the future.

**A continental commitment: The Kampala Declaration**

In January 2025, African leaders adopted the Kampala Declaration. More than a text, it is a vision: to make nutrition and resilience the cornerstones of agricultural development. The ambitions are clear: increase agri-food production by 45% by 2035, cut post-harvest losses in half, and triple intra-African trade. This declaration reminds us that producing more is not enough: we must produce better, for healthier and more diverse diets.

**An ongoing emergency**

On the ground, the reality remains harsh. In several sub-Saharan African countries, severe acute malnutrition exceeds the emergency thresholds set by the WHO[2]. Droughts, conflicts, and soaring food prices are shocks that weaken millions of families. Some progress has been made through supplementation programs or child feeding initiatives, but these remain fragile and reversible. In such a context, enhancing the nutritional value of rice, the staple food for millions of families, can become a key lever against malnutrition.

**Rice, Maize, Wheat: beyond Calories**

White rice stands out as a fast and easily digestible energy source, while white maize provides more fiber and protein, and refined wheat, although less nutrient-dense, remains intermediate. Diversifying their consumption allows people to benefit from rice's energy power while balancing fiber and micronutrient intake through maize and wheat.

---

[1] Source : The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) Report - 2025 | World Food Programme

[2] Source : https://globalnutritionreport.org/reports/

**Nutritional Comparison (100 g – dry product)[3][4]**

| Nutrient | White rice | White maize | Refined wheat |
|---|---|---|---|
| Energy (kcal) | ≈ 365 | ≈ 360 | ≈ 364 |
| Proteins (g) | ≈ 7.1 | ≈ 9.4 | ≈ 10 |
| Fats (g) | ≈ 0.7 | ≈ 4.7 | ≈ 1.0 |
| Carbohydrates (g) | ≈ 80–81 | ≈ 74 | ≈ 76 |
| Fiber (g) | ≈ 1.3 | ≈ 7.3 | ≈ 2.7 |
| Iron (mg) | ≈ 1.2–2.4 | ≈ 2.7 | ≈ 1.2 |
| Zinc (mg) | ≈ 1.1–2.5 | ≈ 1.7–1.9 | ≈ 0.7–0.9 |

**Tangible results**

In Nigeria, golden rice trials showed a significant improvement in vitamin A intake among children. In Zambia and Rwanda, enriched maize and beans have helped reduce anemia and strengthen immunity. These successes illustrate that biofortification is not a theoretical idea, but a practical, sustainable solution adapted to local realities.

**Ongoing situation – Madagascar as a case study**

In Madagascar, the nutrition crisis vividly illustrates the challenge faced across sub-Saharan Africa. Nearly four out of ten children suffer from stunting and more than 7% from acute malnutrition. In the South, the Kere—this cyclical hunger crisis—illustrates the extreme vulnerability of certain communities. Even more paradoxically, the highlands, despite being rice- and food-producing regions, record the country's highest rates of malnutrition[5].

To conclude, diversification breaks malnutrition. Malnutrition remains a major challenge in Africa, exacerbated by excessive reliance on a single staple cereal. The answer is not a miracle product, but dietary diversity. Combining cereals, legumes, fruits, vegetables, and local products can help address deficiencies, improve family health, and strengthen community resilience.

[3] FAO Food Composition Table for Africa http://www.fao.org/infoods/infoods/tables-and-databases/africa/en/
[4] USDA FoodData Central https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/
[5] https://scalingupnutrition.org/sites/default/files/2023-7/PNAMN_2022_2026_FINAL_002_070822.pdf