What is Hidden Hunger?

- Hidden hunger, or micronutrient deficiency, is a major public health problem in developing countries caused by a lack of essential vitamins and minerals (e.g. vitamin A, zinc, iron, iodine) in the diet. Often, the signs of this form of malnutrition are ‘hidden’, as individuals may ‘look alright’ but suffer extremely negative impacts on health and well-being. For example, children may be stunted, have poor night vision or suffer frequently from illness. Adults, too, may succumb more frequently to illness and fatigue easily.

- Hidden hunger can lead to illness, blindness, premature death, reduced productivity, and impaired mental development, particularly among women and children in developing countries.

- 1 out of 3 people in developing countries suffers from hidden hunger, which increases their vulnerability to infection, birth defects, and impaired development.

- People suffering from hidden hunger have diets that are deficient in micronutrients. They habitually eat large amounts of staple food crops (such as maize, wheat, and rice) that are high in calories but lack sufficient micronutrients, and low amounts of foods that are rich in micronutrients such as fruits, vegetables, and animal and fish products.

- People suffering from hidden hunger are often too poor to be able to afford foods that are more nutritious, or otherwise lack access to these foods.

For More Information

- The Micronutrient Initiative (www.micronutrient.org)
- World Health Organization (www.who.int/nutrition/topics/micronutrients/en/)
- HarvestPlus (www.HarvestPlus.org)