

## **The Lagos Statement on Nigeria Food Fortification**

**Statement Delivered by Dr. Chris Isokpunwu, Country SUN Focal Point/Deputy Director, Nutrition Division, FMOH**

### **On behalf of Summit Co-hosts**

I am pleased to make this Statement on Food Fortification on behalf of the hosts of the #NigeriaFutureFortified Stakeholders Dialogue in my capacity as the Country SUN Focal Point/ Deputy Director, Nutrition Division, FMOH.

The #NigeriaFutureFortified Stakeholders Dialogue was formally opened by the Honourable Minister of Health, Prof Isaac Folorunso Adewole with 108 delegates from government as well as leaders from business, academia, international organisations and the media.

We took stock of the Nigeria food fortification program and assessed its successes and challenges, and determined actions that would boost compliance aimed at achieving public health goals – tackling “hidden hunger” or micronutrient deficiencies – which cause 10% of global diseases, inhibit human development and perpetuate poverty and deprivation.

Preventable deficiencies of critical vitamins and minerals such as Vitamin A, D, iron, iodine, folic acid and zinc contribute globally to up to 3million child deaths annually. The 2015 National Nutrition and Health Survey indicates that that **19.4%** of children under the age of 5 in Nigeria are **Underweight**, **32.9% are Stunted** and **7.2% are Wasted**. Micronutrient malnutrition has far-reaching effects on individuals and impedes the economic development of nations. The World Bank has calculated the return on investment in Nutrition interventions as Twenty Five Naira to every Naira (N25:N1) with Food Fortification being one of the most cost effective interventions for tackling micronutrient deficiencies globally.

The central message of today’s Stakeholder Dialogue is that food fortification should become a critical pillar of Nigeria’s food and nutrition security plans. Scaling up the availability and consumption of fortified foods in Nigeria will contribute to the achievement of a number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reduce the incidence of Spina Bifida in unborn children and anaemia among women of reproductive age, and enhance cognitive development within the first 1000 days of life.

Nigeria has come a long way in the past decade. The enabling environment has been built and critical building blocks established. For example, our flour fortification standards are in line with WHO Standards, the national Universal Salt Iodization program has incorporated a robust information management system to track compliance. Discussions on expanding food vehicles for fortification should begin with Rice, Garri, Tomato Paste, Noodles, etc. taking centre stage as possible vehicles.

There is much more to be done. Nigeria once attained about 97% coverage of adequately iodized salt as a result of strong commitment and joint effort between Industry, Government and Development Partners. We need to reinvigorate that program. Through effective fortification of grains with iron, we can expect to achieve a 2.4% reduction per annum in

anaemia. Fortification of wheat flour with folic acid in 18 countries in Africa and Asia could prevent over 50,000 debilitating neural tube defects annually. We cannot lose these opportunities and must ensure that the government, private sector, development partners, civil society and academia are working in unison for these gains.

Food systems and eating habits are changing rapidly due to urbanization, changing climate, land and water use and a younger population. While food fortification alone cannot end malnutrition in Nigeria, it is critical to micronutrient deficiency prevention and control strategies, and is an underexploited public health tool in this country.

Moving forward, the roadmap of activities for effective national fortification agreed today includes:

1. Improved integration of fortification regulatory monitoring into overall food inspection system;
2. Need for government to engage industry on creating the required enabling environment for food fortification. In particular, the issue of inappropriate duties and tariffs for micronutrient premixes must be addressed;
3. Strengthen the convening capacity and capability of NFA for leadership and governance;
4. Reposition the NIS Award program to enable better and voluntary compliance for fortification of staple foods;
5. Develop and implement a system of collation and harmonization of existing data on fortification and also provide platform for sharing results of the periodic monitoring for mandatory public reporting;
6. Develop and implement an M&E framework to assess the quality of the implementation and delivery of food fortification programme, and the degree to which it reaches targeted households and individuals, and achieves the nutritional goals;
7. Undertake research on mandatory fortification of new food vehicles and micronutrients such as iron and folic acid.
8. Develop a roadmap to scale-up home fortification using micronutrient powders (MNPs) linked with infant and young child feeding (IYCF); as well as a roadmap to scale-up bio-fortification;
9. Strengthen the evidence base through the conduct of micronutrient survey and other relevant surveys, and institutionalize data collection for evidence based actions;
10. Develop and implement a social marketing strategy for the food fortification programme.
11. Create and implement a funding mechanism to drive stakeholders' joint fortification activities

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