



Manifesto for Accelerated Action

Convening of Large-Scale Food Fortification Practitioners

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA – APRIL 16-18, 2024

Background: Deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals (micronutrients) cause devastating damage, particularly for children and women of reproductive age, resulting in increased risks of death, disabilities, more severe and longer-lasting illness, and compromised cognitive and physical development and performance and productivity of people and countries.

Globally 1.2 billion women of reproductive age and 372 million children under five years of age suffer from deficiency in at least one essential micronutrient. As food systems are increasingly stressed by shocks from conflicts and the climate crisis and consumers are hit with increased food prices, it is ever more difficult for vulnerable households to access nutritious foods.

“As parents of children affected by birth defects, we urge global stakeholders to act swiftly and ensure access to fortified foods. Let’s save lives and create healthier communities together.”

Beza Beshah, Founder, HOPE-Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus

Large-scale fortification of commonly consumed staples and condiments has demonstrated highly cost-effective impacts, dramatically reducing risks of micronutrient deficiencies and associated health impacts of vulnerable populations: one dollar investment in food fortification delivers 27 dollars of benefits. 100 years of experience in fortification of salt with iodine have resulted in one of the biggest public health successes of our times.

In 2015, H.E. Tumusiime Rhoda Peace, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union delivered a statement at the close of the first-ever global food fortification summit in Arusha, Tanzania, concluding that “food fortification should become a critical pillar of national food and nutrition security plans.” In May 2023, the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution to “Accelerate efforts for preventing micronutrient deficiencies and their consequences, including spina bifida and other neural tube defects, through safe and effective food fortification.” This resolution presents a distinct opportunity to unlock the full potential of food fortification to improve populations’ micronutrient health.

Convening for Action: We, a group of active practitioners in large-scale food fortification, representing government bodies, regional and united nations organizations, donors, civil society, academia, and private sector industry, convened in Cape Town, South Africa, to analyze the key barriers and identify critical steps to accelerate action. We share a commitment to strengthening the delivery of food fortification to maximize impact on the health of vulnerable populations. This Manifesto describes our collective ambition, and key evidence-based recommendations to drive progress from now through 2030.

Manifesto for Accelerated Action: Fortification of salt with iodine is the longest-standing and most successful food fortification program reaching almost 90% of the global population. We aspire that by 2030 the consumption of foods fortified with other critical nutrients including vitamin A, iron, zinc, folic acid and B12 will match the success of iodine fortification. In a world increasingly challenged to meet the nutritional needs of vulnerable populations, there is no excuse for inaction.

As we gear up to the next Nutrition for Growth Summit in March 2025, we have 10 evidence-based recommendations to guide stakeholder commitments:

1. Improve compliance: For all countries with existing food fortification standards, producers of mandated foods and public sector compliance actors commit that at least 90% of mandated food vehicles will be fortified to standard. Premix suppliers and government regulators will ensure that 100% of premixes used for mandatory food fortification programs are of the quality necessary to meet relevant standards.

2. Reach those most in need: Governments and donors will ensure that 100% of food distributed through social assistance programs is fortified to national standards and that more modalities of assistance provide access to fortified foods.

3. Develop effective contextualized advocacy strategies: Inclusive coalitions, including civil society and consumer partners, will help drive advocacy strategies for food fortification targeting context-specific barriers and engaging and empowering impacted communities and local champions (e.g, political leaders, journalists, private sector champions) to speak for the populations in need. We make the invisible partners visible and put humanity back in the advocacy efforts.

4. Integrate in food systems transformation: All sectors will ensure that large-scale food fortification will be incorporated in 100% of national food systems transformation pathways as a critical food systems action to deliver essential micronutrients.

5. Facilitate investment: Governments of at least 90% of low- and middle-income countries will provide tax and import duty exemptions for premix and equipment used for mandatory food fortification programs and address non-tariff barriers.

6. Strengthen national alliances: Building on the legacy of successful national food fortification alliances, country stakeholders will ensure that all countries have effective alliances, under the leadership of government, providing the essential design, oversight, monitoring, and course correction to ensure continuous improvement of fortification programs.

7. Ensure regional leadership: All Regional Economic Communities will provide strong leadership on large-scale food fortification in the form of regional food fortification alliances. This will support regional harmonization of standards, knowledge management, and national accountability and advocacy, as well as the development of legislation and standards in countries that do not yet have these in place.

8. Strengthen reach to vulnerable populations: Under the leadership of national food fortification alliances, programs are reassessed and redesigned in 90% of low- and middle-income countries to better meet micronutrient needs of the most vulnerable populations. The portfolio of food vehicles will be expanded to identify a basket of fortified products that is better able to meet the micronutrient needs of all populations.

9. Share knowledge and data: All global and national large-scale food fortification data and knowledge partners will work collaboratively to ensure that data and knowledge systems are responding to programmatic needs. Partners will improve the coherence, reliability, and trust in evidence and data, and ensure that the wealth of fortification knowledge and experience is proactively curated, disseminated, and used across fortification actors.

10. Integrate the innovation agenda: Partners will unleash the potential for innovation to address bottlenecks in delivery of quality food fortification programs through development of a prioritized innovation action plan based in programmatic needs across assessment, data collection and analysis, food technology, and knowledge management.

Our Commitment to Action:

- We are committed to overcome problems with delivery to close the performance gap and ensure compliance for sustained fortification success.
- We will identify bottlenecks and prioritize actionable solutions in context to accelerate relevant and sufficient coverage and quality.
- We will facilitate a culture of evidence-based decision making through a more effective integration of accessible, trusted and demand-driven data and knowledge systems across the food fortification value chain.
- We will seize the significant potential that social protection programs present to break down gender and other equity barriers to accessing fortified foods and create institutional markets for fortified foods.
- We will have better coordination mechanisms by leveraging and strengthening the power of national fortification alliances and regional bodies.

To achieve these ambitions, we commit to change how we work together. We will use the momentum of this meeting, and of new initiatives, to improve collaboration and accountability across the sector, leveraging the forthcoming revision of the World Health Organization and Food and Agricultural Organization's Guidelines on Food Fortification. We commit to building trust, to collaborate and align, to be transparent about our intentions and progress of work, and to apply the principles of good partnership, which includes active listening and creating a shared understanding of the needs and constraints that each partner has in the environment they operate in.

The Collaborative Action Panel, which advised the convening and drafted this Manifesto, is committed to staying together as a group and reporting back on progress. We recognize that there is a need for this community to become a community of practice to coordinate efforts and to hold itself and the world accountable for delivering on the potential of large-scale food fortification for populations at risk of micronutrient malnutrition.

As we navigate food systems transformation to deliver better nutrition to the most vulnerable in a climate challenged world, unleashing the full potential of large-scale food fortification stands out as a swift and high-impact action. The decades of investments, evidence accumulation and lessons-learned uniquely position us to accelerate action when urgency is paramount. Time is of the essence; there is no time to waste.

About this Manifesto

From April 16-18, 2024, 245 participants representing 100 organizations from governmental bodies, regional economic communities, United Nations organizations, donors, civil society, academia, and the private sector, convened in Cape Town, South Africa. The purpose of the three-day meeting was to address barriers to progress in large scale food fortification and outline critical steps to propel its action forward.

A Collaborative Action Panel, comprising ten professionals from diverse organizations and backgrounds with extensive experience in large-scale food fortification, was assembled and tasked with distilling the high-level findings, insights, and objectives from this convening. The result was the 'Manifesto for Accelerated Action'.

The manifesto captures the collective ambition of the practitioners present at the convening. It is intended to guide the commitments of guide decision-makers, leaders, and advocates from now until 2030. It does not imply endorsement by all the participants or the sponsor of the meeting.

