

Summary of Recommendations and Next Steps for the East Central and Southern African Region

Participants from 9 countries¹ attending the 4th Regional Workshop on Food Fortification held at the Hilton Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya from 28th – 30th September shared country progress reports in implementation of the national food fortification programmes since the last (3rd) regional workshop on food fortification held in Kampala, Uganda in 2005. Countries identified the good practices that can be emulated in other countries and challenges and issues that if addressed at regional level will help to accelerate implementation of food fortification at country level.

After three days of deliberations, the participants provided specific recommendations on the next steps for implementation during the next 2 years to the ECSA-Secretariat. These were agreed under 4 key thematic areas as follows:

1. Policy, Regulations and Standards

Participants attending the meeting:

Recognized the need for strong national policies that address food fortification as a key public health intervention in the fight against micronutrient malnutrition and contributes positively to food and nutrition security in the countries;

Noted that most countries have draft policies and associated standards and regulations formulated through different processes;

Recognized the need for a model regional policy to guide countries in the formulation of their national policies.

Appreciated the work of the ECSA Regional Technical Working Group on Regulations and Standards in developing the ECSA regional guidelines on fortification levels which have been adapted in at least 3 countries;

Recognized that WHO has issued general guidelines on fortification levels that each country and region should study and adjust to their own realities and conditions; and

Reaffirmed the regulatory role of governments in effective implementation of this strategy, including the role of ECSA in harmonizing food fortification standards which is key in facilitating trade within the region.

The participants therefore recommended the following actions to be conducted by the ECSA Secretariat in the next 2 years:

¹ Kenya (host country), Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe

- i) Identify the different policies already available in the region.
- ii) Develop a generic Regional Food and Nutrition Policy to act as a model policy that includes Infant and Young Child Feeding considering the quality and safety of fortified complementary foods.
- iii) Develop Regional Food and Nutrition Strategy which includes food fortification.
- iv) Re-activate the Technical Working Group on Policy, Regulations and Standards which will harmonize the ECSA guidelines fortification levels, consider suggestions provided by the WHO guidelines in this area as well as finalize the model standards on fortified foods that will be recommended to ECSA countries for adoption.

2. Advocacy

Participants attending the meeting

Recognized the need to share information within the region on food fortification and nutrition related issues;

Acknowledged that the ECSA Secretariat in collaboration with other Partners in the region have developed some advocacy materials on food fortification;

Further noted that, some countries have draft communication strategies on food fortification and that consumer organizations are key in implementing these strategies;

Appreciated that some countries have developed national logos for fortified foods and recognized the need for discussing the suitability of having a regional logo that can be used across the countries in the region;

Recognized the need for pooling of experts in food fortification who can provide technical assistance in the different components of food fortification programs; and

Recommended the following actions to be conducted by the ECSA Secretariat in the next 2 years:

- i) Review the available advocacy materials for different target audiences in the region and share with the countries.
- ii) Assist the countries in reviewing and finalizing their communication strategies.
- iii) Identify Consumer Organizations in the countries and work with them on consumer education (social marketing).
- iv) Facilitate the discussions about a regional food fortification logo.
- v) Link country nutrition websites to the ECSA Food Fortification website and send out periodic e-newsletters to update countries on work in the region.

- vi) Mobilize resources and conduct a training of food fortification experts in the region in collaboration with Universities and other institutions of higher learning in the region.
- vii) Encourage and support the participation of countries at international meetings dealing with fortification issues such as the CODEX meetings.
- viii) Hold periodic regional meetings preferably at two-years intervals to review progress, share experiences, lessons learnt and identify best or promising practices for replication and scaling up in the region.
- ix) Facilitate Sector meetings of the various working groups in accordance with the two - year's action plans.

3. Food Control

Participants attending the meeting

Acknowledged the work done by the ECSA Technical Working Group on Regulations, Standards and Food Control with support from USAID-A2Z in developing the 17 food control manuals on internal and external monitoring of fortified foods and training some countries on their use;

Recognized the need for further training on use of these manuals;

Noted that food control is carried out by different government regulatory bodies with the mandate to enforce standards but that, more often, results are not shared with other government agencies and stakeholders;

Further noted the need for use of quality and safe fortificants and/or premixes during production of fortified foods which ultimately affects compliance of fortified foods with the national regulations and standards; and

Recommended the following actions to be conducted by the ECSA Secretariat in the next 2 years:

- i) Establish a Regional Technical Working Group on Food Control which among other duties will finalize the reporting manual for food control exercises in countries; finalize the ECSA regional guidelines for premix certification; and recommend a list of fortificants and/or premix suppliers.
- ii) Organize regional training sessions to share the training manuals for inspection courses and assist countries to mobilize resources for provision of adequate tools for inspection at country level.
- iii) Arrange for exchange visits for inspectors between countries to share experiences and learn from those that are performing better in food control.
- iv) Identify other on-going Laboratory Proficiency Testing Schemes (LPTS) in the region and harmonize the ECSA LPTS with these and find out how the aspect of analysis of micronutrients can be incorporated in these other LPTS.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Participants attending the meeting

Reaffirmed that “*Fortification is Science based*” and noted the need for accurate baseline information and monitoring data for planning and designing food fortification programs;

Acknowledged that a Regional Technical Working Group on Monitoring and Evaluation has been established and received training on use of data obtained from Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) to make estimates on consumption of fortified foods;

Further acknowledged that most countries have data from these HIES and other national surveys that can be used to make estimates on consumption of fortified foods; and

Recommended the following actions to be conducted by the ECSA Secretariat in the next 2 years:

- i) Support the work of the M&E Technical Working Group and facilitate at least 2 meetings in a year² which should preferably follow with the food control meetings for sharing information and data consolidation.
- ii) Carry out an inventory of the surveys that have been done and/or on-going in the countries such as the HIES (done every 2 years in Uganda), Food Consumption Surveys in Zambia, Demographic Health Surveys in almost all countries etc
- iii) In collaboration with the Statistical bodies and nutritionists in the countries, identify data gaps from these surveys and facilitate the designing of relevant data collection protocols that can be used to obtain data on consumption of the fortified staple foods and conduct a further training on data analysis.
- iv) Identify and make an inventory of the functional laboratories for biomarkers (e.g urinary iodine, serum and breast milk retinol and iron status indicators and others) and mobilize resources for them to support effectiveness monitoring under a regional approach.

² This recommendation is for given special attention to this area, which has just being added into the ECSA regional plan. The other working groups have already had worked for several years and the M&E working group needs to accelerate the programming and implementation of its activities.