



**Republic of the Gambia
Ministry of Health
The Quadrangle
Banjul**

SEVENTY-NINTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER, GENEVA 2026

Agenda Item P	Accelerating efforts for preventing micronutrient deficiencies and their consequences, including spina bifida and other neural tube defects, through safe and effective food fortification resolution WHA76.19 (2023)
Documents:	A79/26 and A79/26 Add.1
Requested action	Take note of the report
Time limit:	3 MINS
Commission	B

Dear Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Gambia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Central African Republic on behalf of the WHO African Region.

Micronutrient deficiencies remain a significant global public health concern, including in The Gambia, particularly among women of reproductive age and young children. These deficiencies have serious consequences for health, development, and survival. Neural tube defects, including spina bifida, occur early in pregnancy and are largely preventable through adequate folic acid intake.

The Gambia continues to address micronutrient deficiencies through a combination of regulatory, programmatic, and community-based interventions. We have long-standing regulations on universal salt iodization.

According to the Gambia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2019–20, anaemia affects approximately 55% of children under five and 45% of women, while only about 77% of households have adequately iodized salt. In addition, maternal iron supplementation coverage remains low, highlighting persistent gaps in micronutrient intake despite ongoing national efforts.

The long-standing regulation on salt iodization was reviewed and expanded into a comprehensive food fortification regulation in 2020. This regulation mandates the fortification of wheat flour with iron and folic acid, edible oils with vitamin A, and salt with iodine.

Similarly, The Gambia is promoting the production and consumption of biofortified foods—including orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, yellow maize, cassava, and African leafy vegetables—through social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) initiatives.

In response, The Gambia is strengthening food fortification efforts, including salt iodization, and is taking steps to scale up the fortification of staple foods such as wheat flour and edible oils with essential micronutrients, including iron and vitamin A. These efforts are complemented by micronutrient supplementation, dietary diversification, and the integration of nutrition services within primary health care.

However, challenges remain, including limited coverage of fortified foods, gaps in enforcement, and the need for stronger surveillance systems to monitor micronutrient status and programme impact.

We therefore call for enhanced global and regional support to expand mandatory food fortification, strengthen regulatory and quality assurance systems, and improve monitoring and data systems.

The Gambia takes note of the report.

Thank you