



FORTIFY AND THE WELLBEING FOUNDATION AFRICA ANNOUNCE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO REDUCE IRON DEFICIENCY AND IMPROVE MATERNAL SURVIVAL IN WEST AFRICA

Partnership combines private sector ingenuity with local know-how and leadership to save the lives of millions of women and children suffering from iron deficiency

May 6, 2020- CHICAGO, Illinois and LAGOS, NIGERIA -- U.S.-based Fortify and Nigeria-based Wellbeing Foundation Africa (WBFA) today announce a formal partnership to address iron deficiency – the major underlying cause of maternal deaths during childbirth in developing countries.

Iron deficiency is the most widespread public health disorder in the world, affecting at least one-third of the global population. In the absence of adequate interventions, Fortify works to drive innovation in the private sector, guiding companies to add iron to everyday meals through the fortification of simple, healthy foods consumed by most families.

The World Bank and the Copenhagen Consensus have both ranked food fortification as one of the best investments in development in terms of cost effectiveness. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), food-based approaches represent the most desirable and sustainable method of preventing micronutrient malnutrition.

Fortify's efforts with leading food producers have already resulted in the monthly production of 20 million sachets of iron-fortified tomato paste varieties in Nigeria alone – an historic milestone in food fortification as it is the first-ever, iron fortified tomato-based product. Production and distribution in Ghana are expected later this year.

The partnership with the Wellbeing Foundation Africa, a Nigeria-based non-governmental organization dedicated to maternal, newborn and child health, brings substantial resources to support Fortify's work. In addition to its deep relationships with governments and institutions in West Africa and globally, WBFA has the infrastructure and network to educate community health workers and families about the potentially life-saving benefit of consuming this improved version of tomato paste, a West African staple.

Iron is the essential element necessary for building blood. In developing countries, the main cause of iron deficiency is low iron bioavailability of the diet. Premenopausal women are particularly vulnerable due to iron loss in menstrual blood and the increased iron demands of pregnancy. The overall global prevalence of anemia is just over 40% among two highly vulnerable populations: women aged 15–49 years and children under the age of five. In developing countries, the prevalence exceeds 50%. Iron deficiency can lead to premature labor, intrauterine growth retardation, low birth weight of the infant, birth asphyxia, neonatal anemia, and death (of both the mother and the child). The consequences of iron deficiency not only affect personal health, but the economic health of communities and countries as well.

“Joining forces with the Wellbeing Foundation at this juncture could not be better timing. Now that iron-fortified tomato mixes are reaching even the most rural villages, we can jointly work to help educate health care workers and women about the importance of adding iron to their diets,” said Fortify’s Founder and CEO, Nancy Martin.

“Mrs. Saraki has been a leading voice in maternal, newborn and child health in Nigeria since serving as the First Lady of Kwara State in 2003, and knows how to reach and educate stakeholders at every level in Nigeria. She is also a recognized global voice for women, newborns and children, advising multiple organizations including the World Health Organization and the United Nations. We are especially pleased that Mrs. Saraki has recently accepted our invitation to serve as a member of Fortify’s Advisory Council.”

Mrs. Saraki commented, “When we began discussions with Fortify, I was struck by how elegant yet practical a solution this is for iron deficiency anemia in that tomato paste is already built into the food supply and is a big part of meals every African eats.”

“According to the WHO the benefits of ending iron deficiency anemia are substantial as timely treatment can restore personal health and raise national productivity levels by as much as 20%,” she continued.

“This new initiative will engage with First Ladies and policymakers across Africa in accelerated efforts to eradicate iron deficiency. I know how much impact First Ladies in Africa can bring to women, families and communities, particularly in improving maternal health outcomes due to their highly visible advocacy. Together, the Wellbeing Foundation Africa and Fortify are determined to end the devastating effects of iron deficiency on women and their families.”

About Fortify

Fortify was founded in 2012, when it began exploring market-based alternatives to iron fortified flour, which is mandated by some African governments, but is not widely distributed to the rural areas that make up nearly 70% of most African countries. In West Africa, Fortify determined that tomato paste, an important ingredient in most meals, would be the best food vehicle for iron fortification. Tomatoes are rich in Vitamin C, a necessary nutrient to boost iron absorption. In 2015, Fortify presented to one of the largest tomato paste producers the opportunity to positively impact the health of its consumers while building market share. Also that year,

Fortify's Founder and CEO, Nancy Martin, introduced this tomato paste concept to a team of nutrition scientists at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Soon afterwards, USAID sponsored a study Identifying Potential New Food Vehicles for Fortification in West Africa, publishing a report in 2018 that showed high levels of tomato paste consumption: <https://www.gainhealth.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/identifying-potential-new-food-vehicles-for-fortification-in-west-africa-2018.pdf>.

[For more information, visit www.fortifyfood.org](http://www.fortifyfood.org) or follow [@FortifyAfrica](https://twitter.com/FortifyAfrica)

About Wellbeing Foundation Africa

The Wellbeing Foundation Africa was founded in 2004 by Her Excellency Mrs. Toyin Ojora Saraki with the aim of improving health outcomes for women, infants, and children. WBFA combines programs with advocacy work in Nigeria and around the world. More than 200,000 women have taken part in WBFA's flagship 'MamaCare' classes in Nigeria. WBFA midwives transform the lives of mothers, their children, and their communities by providing healthcare training to a global standard. In 2018 the organization launched a WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) program and has worked with partners such as Global Water 2020 to save lives and meet global health goals in the countries it serves. For more information, visit <https://www.wbfafrica.org>.

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