

# Unilever Industries



## Background and motivation

Published in 2017, [Unilever's position on fortification](#) outlines its commitment to help tackle micronutrient deficiencies in developed and emerging markets, by offering fortified foods at an affordable price. Its explicit commitment states that 'by 2022, we're aiming to provide more than 200 billion servings with a least one of the five key micronutrients: vitamin A, D, iodine, iron and zinc.' In 2021, the company claimed to achieve sales of more than 161 billion servings of products fortified with at least one micronutrient, and this year (2022), Unilever announced that this number rose to 213 billion, achieving their commitment. The company's main fortified products are bouillon (under the brands Knorr and Royco), a fortified drink product (under the brand Horlicks), Maizena porridges and savory products. The company's continued efforts to improve the availability of nutritious products in developed and emerging markets has positioned it as a credible and trustworthy collaborator for the Nigerian government as well as other organizations.

The company has a collaborative approach and, in 2015, partnered with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, the growing Business Foundation and Society for Family Health, the Nigerian Nutrition Society, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development to develop and deliver a six-week home- and school-based community program for mothers and teenagers. The program, titled 'Follow in my Green Footsteps', aimed to combat the high incidence of iron deficiency in women by changing their cooking behaviors. The program promoted the use of iron-fortified Knorr cubes, along with other green leafy vegetables high in iron, in a commonly consumed stew recipe. In addition, as part of Unilever's Future Foods initiative, the company committed to

doubling the number of products delivering positive nutrition by 2025, which translates to 54% of their product portfolio. This includes the fortification of packaged foods with micronutrients beyond the five mentioned in its 2017 commitment.

## Current fortification practices

The guiding principles Unilever has taken to deliver successful fortification are:

- **Offering a selection of frequently consumed, affordable products**, which are part of the diet of priority populations and commonly accepted as suitable vehicles for fortification. The company also fortifies some additional products to address specific consumer concerns.
- **The development of internal guidelines**, which apply to its global portfolio and are based on advice from the World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. In addition, the company has committed to complying with international and local regulations and guidelines, such as Codex Alimentarius, for its fortified products.
- For its fortified products, **a minimum of 15% of the recommended daily intake** per serving must be met, unless this is regulated differently at the national level.
- Fortified food products produced by the company must be **safe to consume**, for both target and non-target populations.

## Creating an enabling regulatory environment

Unilever supports WHO's call for action regarding the use of iodized salt in processed foods and calls for legislation enforcing that all salt used in processed food be iodized. The company believes and supports the notion that local regulations should not be an obstacle for international trade in situations where there is no expectation of unintended effects on consumers.

The company also commits to using government-endorsed national logos on all its fortified packaged foods, as well as running campaigns to increase consumer awareness of micronutrients and nutritious meals. These measures enable consumers to make informed choices based on easy-to-interpret information.

To ensure the micronutrient intake needs of the population are met through the supply of safe, fortified foods, Unilever supports the tracking of the population's health status, as well as the progress of national fortification efforts. The company states that using such data supports the development of effective and safe fortified foods. Therefore, the company encourages governments and health authorities to build transparent and effective partnerships, establish clear responsibilities, and promote an enabling legislative environment to obtain this information.

## Mandating fortified Bouillon cube in Nigeria

Bouillon cubes are seen as an effective and cost-effective vehicle through which to distribute micronutrients in Nigeria. Unilever is supportive of fortification and voluntarily fortifies bouillon with iron. Unilever's bouillon cubes reach the most vulnerable groups in Nigeria and, to support affordability and consumption, cubes are offered at a competitively low price. In 2021, Knorr and Royco bouillon had 18.8% of the market share of bouillon in Nigeria, with sales reaching up to 100 USD million.

Mandating bouillon cube fortification is an important topic under discussion in Nigeria. Although the Nigerian government has developed and adopted a bouillon manufacturing and safety standards, there is no national guidance on micronutrient fortification of the product. The country's National Fortification Alliance (NFA), established in 2004 with support from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), under the chairmanship of the National Planning Commission (NPC) comprises of Helen Keller International (HKI) and the national governmental regulatory bodies The National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC). The NFA was established to mobilize stakeholders and provide guidance and assess the present status of large-scale food fortification programs to improve the nutritional status and health of Nigeria's populations. deliberate on the potential of including bouillon cubes as a food vehicle in fortification.<sup>i</sup>

This led to the formation of Nigeria's country working group, of which Unilever is a member. The agenda of this group includes exploring the mandating of fortified bouillon seasoning /cubes, including the need for government to provide guidance on voluntary bouillon

fortification, which is presently conducted by some bouillon producing industries in the country. The group wishes to generate evidence through research and inform policy decision makers about bouillon cube and fortification. Among other points of attention, the group is investigating the contribution of salt in bouillon to the average recommended daily salt intake (<5g per day) and the potential use of bouillon as a vehicle for multiple micronutrients.

With government responsible for compliance, mandating bouillon cube fortification has the potential to create a level playing field across the food and beverage industry and improves the delivery of essential micronutrients to Nigeria's population.

<sup>i</sup> <https://guardian.ng/business-services/stakeholders-exploit-bouillon-cubes-to-upscale-fortified-food-production/>

