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TBS on the spot over fortification standards

By Patrick Kisembo

NUTRITION stakeholders have accused the government of taking more than ten years in the preparation of fortification standards.

The undue delay was equated to misusing of public funds in what the World Bank describes as 'silent corruption' where officers just attend meeting for fortification without implementing what they had discussed.

World Bank Country Director for Tanzania, Uganda and Burundi John Murray McIntire said they did not understand why the government was delaying in setting the standards.

He said the delays brought a lot of negative effects to the people, children, and women especially when they do not get food with enough nutrients.

"In fact, we have trouble in understanding why these delays persist," he noted.

Presenting a policy note on malnutrition, Hans Hoozeveer, Uwazi manager at Twaweza, said there had been a lot of meetings being attended outside the country

by government officials aiming at setting fortification standards but no real progress had been made in food fortification.

He said meetings and research alone without implementation on the ground was a waste of money and aims.

According to a recent study, Tanzania participated in a regional health conference held at Uganda in November 2002 and agreed on "enhanced implementation and co-ordination of food fortification interventions both at the regional and national levels"

It also reveals that government officers have attended several workshops on food fortification between 2002 and 2009 in countries like Kenya, South Africa, Malawi, Seychelles, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Swaziland, besides similar meetings held in Arusha.

"With these meetings we would expect at least one among the three standards would have been established by now," said Janneke Jorgensen, WB nutrition specialist.

The stakeholders said

despite all the meetings where public funds had been spent on, nothing positive on food fortification had been achieved.

Responding to the accusations, Tanzania Bureau of Standards chief standards officer Faustine Masaga said the bureau had proposed the standards already, but when they were forwarded to the stakeholders for their comments, many of them were dissatisfied with the proposed standards.

"Almost all of them rejected the standards. We had to return it for more study," said Masaga, promising that by June, a standard on cooking oil, wheat flour and maize flour would be ready.

He however said that traders were allowed to voluntarily use other fortification standards at a time when the bureau was preparing a mandatory one.

He stated it is complicated to set a standard due to the fact that it would have an impact on many producers.

The WB on Wednesday threatened to withdraw a USD 2m support if the government failed to set fortified standards.