

PREFACE

One of the recommendations of the national survey in children 6 – 71 months of age in 1995 commissioned by the Department of Health and conducted by the South African Vitamin A Consultative Group (SAVACG) was that due consideration should be given to initiating a programme of food fortification with a view to addressing micronutrient deficiencies in the country. The Directorate: Nutrition of the Department of Health, following extensive consultations with local and overseas experts, issued a Tender for a survey on the food consumption patterns in children aged 1 – 9 years with special emphasis on children living in areas of low socio-economic status. The nine Universities teaching Nutrition/Dietetics in the country, having formed a Consortium, the National Food Consumption Survey (NFCS) were awarded the Tender. Following further discussions between the Directorate: Nutrition of the Department of Health and the University Consortium, the initial specifications of the Tender were expanded to include the evaluation of the anthropometric status of these children as well as their nutrient intake. This report summarises the key findings of the national survey.

In the report itself, the socio-demographic findings and the findings on the anthropometric status are presented first, in order to impart sufficient background for the main findings. A separate chapter is devoted to each of the components of the survey. Each chapter consists of its text with some Figures on selected key findings for ease of reading. More information regarding the data and findings of the survey appears in the Tables at the end of each chapter. Additional information in the form of box-plots is also provided, as appropriate, in the Appendices. In view of the close interrelationship of the survey components, a separate chapter has been created (Chapter 9) in which all the findings are discussed in a summary form and in the order the components of the survey appear in the report. All recommendations have been included in this chapter and in the Executive Summary. The latter, apart from the recommendations also includes selected key findings of the survey. The Appendices include the Questionnaires that

were developed specifically for and used in the survey, the Training Manual and other selected information deemed to be of interest to the reader.

The NFCS attached great urgency in compiling this report with a view to making the main results of the study available as soon as possible. For this reason, the statistical analysis of the data has been limited to the most important aspects of the survey. Further detailed analysis of the data is currently being completed by some participants in the survey as part of their postgraduate studies. The results of this further analysis, however, are unlikely to have a major influence on the proposed recommendations. The directors of the NFCS have agreed that the results of the survey will also be published in peer reviewed scientific journals.

In deciding on the proposed recommendations, the feasibility and efficacy of implementing internationally recommended plans of action within the country's framework of health care services and the available expertise have, as far as possible, been borne in mind. However, a detailed discussion, for example, of the mechanisms for rural economic development, an essential ingredient of sustainable elimination of undernutrition, falls well outside the scope and objectives of this survey. Nevertheless, in general terms, the proposed recommendations have been made, using both the findings from the present survey and some plausible solutions suggested in other policy documents.

The Directorate: Nutrition of the Department of Health is the major sponsor for this survey. The Micronutrient Initiative, UNICEF and MOST (USAID) have also made a very substantial financial contribution. This survey would not have been possible without the excellent community support it received, or without the commitment, dedication and hard work of the directors, coordinators, team leaders and fieldworkers of the survey, and the personnel of the Directorate: Nutrition of the Department of Health. The University Consortium consisted of (in alphabetical order) the Universities of Cape Town, Free State, MEDUNSA, Natal, North, Potchefstroom, Pretoria, Stellenbosch (Chair and legal entity for the Tender) and Western Cape. Other role players are duly acknowledged in the appropriate chapter.