

## Key Role-Players' and Consumers' Perceptions of the Current Salt Reduction Strategy in South Africa: Opportunities and Challenges

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### Abstract

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death in the world and account for 51% of all deaths in South Africa (SA). Cardiovascular-related deaths are the biggest contributor to NCD mortality rates and are closely associated with an unhealthy diet, especially a diet too high in sodium.

South Africans' salt intake is much higher than the daily recommended intake of 5 g. Too much dietary salt intake is linked to hypertension, eventually leading to CVD, and is the main dietary risk factor for mortality and illness worldwide. Regular consumption of processed food plays a significant role in the salt intake of South Africans.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has brought forward an action plan with the vision "of a world free of the avoidable burden of NCD" where two of the nine global targets are focusing on a reduction in salt intake and the prevalence of hypertension. These two targets are 1) a 30% relative reduction in mean population intake of salt/sodium and 2) a 25% relative reduction in the prevalence of raised blood pressure, according to national circumstances.

SA was one of the pioneering countries to implement an innovative mandatory salt reduction strategy in conjunction with a public awareness and education campaign to reduce the populations' dietary salt intake. The mandatory implementation to reduce salt in certain processed foods was done in a step-wise approach. The first mandatory sodium restriction targets for processed foods came into effect in June 2016 and the last of the implementation targets came into effect in April 2020.

The strategy was developed through consultation with various key role-players, including food manufacturers, academia and research institutions before implementation commenced. It is however essential to continue to engage key role-players and consumers around the salt reduction strategy to ascertain the way forward. This presentation will focus on research conducted after the implementation of the strategy, to explore possible barriers, identify challenges, and put recommendations in place to strengthen the current salt reduction strategy.

### PRESENTER BIOGRAPHY: NELENE KOEN

Dr Nelene Koen is a registered dietitian and senior lecturer in the Division of Human Nutrition, Department of Global Health, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University. She coordinates and teaches various undergraduate and postgraduate modules, provide post-graduate study supervision to Master of Therapeutic Nutrition, Public Health Nutrition and Food and Nutrition Security students and is actively involved in research related to food and nutrition labelling in South Africa, the South African sodium regulations and health promotion levy. She has presented her research at various national and international congresses and has published in several accredited peer-reviewed journals. She is the recipient of the Stellenbosch University Rector's award for Excellence in Teaching. Her main areas of interest falls within the public health nutrition domain and includes food and nutrition labelling, population-wide strategies to combat non-communicable diseases, organic foods and GMOs.