

The Iodized Salt Program Assessment Tool

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fortification of salt with iodine to prevent iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) may well be one of the greatest public health success stories of the 20th century. Within the last two decades it was established that iodine deficiency was the leading cause of preventable mental impairment worldwide and that the majority of the world's population was at risk of IDD. The fortification of salt with iodine was found to be a safe and cost-effective strategy and has been advocated for all at-risk populations since 1990. As a public health prevention strategy, the fortification of salt requires the collaboration of the salt industry, various government ministries, medical societies, consumer groups, and the ultimate beneficiary, the consumer.

As little as a decade ago, countries were struggling with establishing programs to address this deficiency. The 1999 State of the World's Children by UNICEF now estimates that about 66% of households worldwide are using iodized salt. This remarkable accomplishment is the result of successful progression from solid scientific studies describing the problem and demonstrating the safety and efficacy of the interventions to political advocacy, collaboration with the salt industry, and establishment of comprehensive programs.

Many countries are now beginning to assess their progress. Biologic measurements alone will not determine the adequacy of the infrastructure that must be in place for elimination efforts to be sustained. The review of progress should also assess *all* of the elements

that make up a successful program. This approach will allow a determination of whether effective *systems* are in place and followed in such a way that elimination efforts will be both successful and *sustained*.

2. THE ASSESSMENT TOOL

The Iodized Salt Program Assessment Tool was developed to respond to the need for comprehensive assessment of progress. This manual is designed to assist governments with assessing progress in eliminating iodine deficiency, and concentrates on analyzing the program elements necessary for *sustainability* by looking at the systems in place in national programs. In doing so, it focuses on three essential program elements: 1) **The product**--ensuring that all salt for human and animal consumption is iodized according to government standards for iodine content and that quality assurance (QA) mechanisms are in place; 2) **The process**--maintaining a program that generates political will and financial commitment from the government and donors; that ensures adequate communication among the many partners involved; that educates its population on the importance of consuming iodized salt; and that is managed efficiently and effectively; 3) **The progress**--measuring iodized salt coverage and the iodine deficiency status of the population, monitoring progress over time, and ensuring adequate surveillance to prevent recurrence of deficiency. The manual provides an overview of each program element, and checklists that can be used to review all aspects of that element.

The manual is divided into chapters that reflect these key program elements. These chapters include discussion on assessing production, packaging and labeling, quality assurance and distribution; assessing policy and advocacy; assessing the strength of the regulatory environment including enforcement; assessing systems for program monitoring and laboratory capacity; assessing educational activities and communication; and assessing overall program management.

3. USE OF THE ASSESSMENT TOOL

The manual is designed for program managers--those responsible for the implementing program activities. In addition, the manual can be used by any group wishing to examine in detail the various elements of the program. The manual may be used for assessment by the government itself, or for a formal expert assessment to determine whether elimination has been achieved, and whether the program elements needed are in place.

The manual may be used at any point in the development of the national program, but is likely to be most useful once program elements are in place and functioning, as a means to assess strengths and weaknesses. In addition,

the manual serves as a tool to review whether elimination has been achieved, covering not only reduction in biologic indicators, but also reviewing the strengths of the necessary program elements needed for sustainability.

Such a manual is needed to identify successful as well as unsuccessful program elements; to facilitate comparisons across regions on progress made; to provide a step by step method for evaluating each element of the multisectoral IDD program; to provide an opportunity to meet with leaders to present findings and renew commitments toward elimination goals; and to highlight monitoring efforts, and stress the need for ongoing monitoring to ensure program sustainability.

The manual has been used in several countries, including Malawi and China, to facilitate national program review.

As we enter the next decade, understanding what is working and what needs continued input to ensure that iodine deficiency does not reappear will be critical to protect vulnerable populations. This manual is designed as one small contribution to make that understanding easier.