cost and efficacy against opportunistic illnesses, CTMX should be offered as a part of the basic HIV care regime.

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Micronutrients Towards India’s GDP Growth - Snapshot on India’s Quest Towards Sustainable and Permanent Solutions to Eliminate Iodine Deficiency Disorders

Sir,

India is poised to become one of the world’s leading economies along with the United States of America and China. As per the Goldman Sachs BRIC (Brazil, Republic of South Africa, India, China) projection, 2007, India will show unprecedented economic growth by 2050.

However, India’s quest to become a superpower and the effort to keep its prestigious role in shaping the global economy is also coupled with the inability to defeat chronic iodine deficiency in the past 50 years. As per the latest projections of the Ministry for the Development of the North Eastern region India loses 4% of its GDP due to malnutrition. India’s economic power is largely dependent on high-end services like Information Technology (IT) and outsourcing of knowledge to high-end technology services, which draws on intellectual capital of its young people. Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD), an easily preventable disease has been successfully eliminated in many countries, by establishing regular consumption habits of adequately iodized salt. Surprisingly, in India, only 51% of the population consumes adequately iodized salt. This shows admittedly that India till date has had limited success to protect its citizens from the risk of impaired intellectual development. Yearly 13.8 million newborns in India are at risk of lowered intellectual capacity. At the time when India needs its youth more than ever to propel it into the league of developed countries, this weakness will prove detrimental in its quest to become a developed economy.

The current IDD situation is not making optimal progress due to a variety of factors. There is a myth prevalent about the production of sufficient quantity of adequately iodized salt coupled with inertia of the private sector (quality salt producers). Official statistics show that India produces enough iodized salt and it is sufficiently supplying the population, but the ground reality is somewhat different partially explained by the fact that there is a lack of efficient state monitoring and progress measurement system.
The various interventions of the Government and multilateral organizations, for instance, the legislation which bans production of non iodised salt meant for human consumption, the launch of small scale periodic media campaigns, or even the setting up of new iodization plants, could not come to fruition because of the low delivery of supply, the missing distribution channels and well targeted marketing of the salt sector.

Reviews of the IDD elimination programmes and field research\(^5\), clearly point to the fact that:

“The low-income segment of the Indian population, despite all development efforts don’t consume sufficiently iodized salt not because they can’t afford to buy the good quality product, but because either the product is not available in rural markets or the claimed iodized salt is of questionable quality.”

This is the key challenge for all of us. The private sector has a great potential to pioneer a breakthrough and lead the permanent and sustainable solutions toward universal salt iodization. Increasing their production, building new distribution channels under a pro-poor/rural business model and partnering with other producers to establish high quality standards of iodization, opens a perspective for creating a permanent solution. The government on the other hand should ensure monitoring, extensive advocacy and reinforce the regulation.

Why would then a country like India, where the economic progress is largely based on its intellectual capital, not pay close attention to this serious public health deficit, which impacts the cognitive power of its human capital tomorrow?

Indian Scientists have played a pioneering role in prevention and control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders worldwide i.e., Iodine Deficiency Disorders Elimination Program Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation, including technical assistance for production of good quality iodized salt.

Interventions are also necessary for opening a dialogue between private sector, including small and medium scale producers, multilateral development agencies and the government, to create mutually beneficial and more importantly, profitable market-based solutions. Solutions, that are sustainable and permanent, which means that there is consistent product quality across the market, the market is inclusive and empowers the small- and medium scale producers and where supply of adequately iodized salt is permanently ensured, specially to rural and below poverty line population. To reach this goal all stakeholders (government, multilateral agencies, private sector, NGO’s, scientific institutions, communities) should demonstrate stewardship, execute according to respective roles and responsibilities and more importantly collectively strive for the solution. How long will it take to leverage our country’s potential and permanently eliminate IDD?

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