Davao City makes a breakthrough in their salt iodization program

Davao City, nestled in Mindanao in southeastern Philippines, is now making great strides in its salt iodization program. The achievements of the city – 84% household usage of iodized salt and 99% of salt iodization in public markets – is a far cry from several years ago. In 1998-99, 34% of children in the province suffered from moderate-to-severe iodine deficiency, and only 23% of households used iodized salt.

Theo San Luis, ICCIDD, the Philippines

The Big Turnaround

Davao City adopted a Food Fortification Program as early as 1993 but it was not until 1999 when the program gained significant momentum. In May 1999, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) chose to assist Davao under its “Ending Hidden Hunger Project”, a project supporting Universal Salt Iodization (USI).

The launch of the Ending Hidden Hunger program at the First City Summit on Salt Iodization in March 2000 marked the turning point in the city’s iodization program. The event brought together the key sectors: government, private business and civil society to forge agreements for the program. The following five key agreements were made:

1. Food processors, salt manufacturers and academia were included as members of the City Nutrition Committee
2. Food fortification education and training to be given to food manufacturers
3. Incentives such as tax rebates and acquisition of Sangkap Pinoy (food fortification seal from the Department of Health) for manufacturers who comply with requirements
4. Massive information campaign on food fortification to create demand for iodized salt and fortified foods
5. Create and monitor implementation of ordinances for the promotion of USI

The local government passed Local Ordinance No. 95 in October 2000, mobilizing all sectors to ensure salt iodization in the city. The ordinance provides for the use of iodized salt in the preparation of food and its wider availability to customers. In 2001, the local government created an ad hoc group to ensure the effective implementation of the salt iodization program. The ad hoc group was comprised of the City Mayor’s office, the City Health Office, trade department, ports authority, Kiwanis Club of Davao City and the Davao City Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

A year later, Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte created the Davao City Task Force on Salt Iodization (formerly the ad hoc group) to boost, sustain and ensure implementation of salt iodization and food fortification programs in the city. The task force consists of the following agencies and organizations:

- Office of the City Mayor – Chairperson
- Kiwanis Club of Davao City – Co-chairperson
- City Health Office – Secretariat
- Members: City Legal Office, City Cooperative Development Office, Bureau of Customs, City Economic Enterprise, City Information Office, Department of Health, Department of Education, Department of Trade and Industry, Davao City Chamber of Commerce and Industry
**Significant achievements**

The 12-person task force achieved the goals of the project sooner than expected due to overwhelming support from the city government, donors and key sectors.

**A. Increase in usage of iodized salt**

Based on the survey conducted by the Manila Office of Helen Keller International for the Department of Health, household use of iodized salt jumped from 40% in 2001 to 84% in 2003. Moreover, 99% of salt in markets contains iodine.

This can be attributed to the lowering of iodized salt prices from PhP 12/kg (equivalent to US$ 0.23) in 2001 to PhP 4-6/kg (US$ 0.07-0.11 cents) in 2003. The Task Force facilitated the price decrease of iodized salt after it purchased 50 sacks of iodized salt and commissioned barangay (village) health workers to repack and sell the salt at a lower price. Since then, warehouses significantly reduced prices from PhP 168 (US$ 3.23)/sack to PhP 88 (US$ 1.69)/sack of salt.

**B. Increased awareness on food fortification and salt iodization**

The effective information campaign has created a paradigm shift among consumers and businesses in Davao City. Food fortification/Iodization seminars, information education and communication materials and integration of salt iodization in school curricula and health workers’ education has generated more support and increased demand for iodine-fortified foods. The food industry was then compelled to fortify their food products. Big corporations such as Universal Robina, Pilimico Mauri foods, bakeshops and other food manufacturers agreed to use iodized salt in their production.

**C. Formation of other Salt Iodization Task Forces in the country**

The Davao City Task Force helped establish task forces in five other cities in the Philippines namely: Cagayan de Oro, General Santos, Cebu, Bacolod, Zamboanga, and Iligan. Advocacy was conducted during meetings with local leaders of Kiwanis International in these areas. They highlighted the program as a World Service Project of Kiwans and encouraged them to emulate the Davao City Task Force as model. A joint meeting was held including a majority of these leaders to formally initiate the establishment of their respective task forces.

**Looking forward**

Even though Davao City has made strides towards achieving Universal Salt Iodization, there is a lot to be done. The Task Force is now focusing its efforts on capacity building of local salt cooperatives, intensifying the information campaign on salt iodization and food fortification through radio, and promotion of vitamin A and iron fortification to fully implement the “Ending Hidden Hunger Project”.

**It is hoped that with the continued support and increased cooperation from all sectors, 100% iodization of salt will soon be a reality in Davao City.**