

# Small scale salt producers unite to strengthen local production of iodized salt in the southern Philippines

**Karie Atkinson** GAIN, Geneva, Switzerland. Photos by Arnold Duque, Chairman, TAMACO, the Philippines.

“The effort of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) to build the capacity of local salt producers like me to collectively produce and distribute salt fortified with iodine is empowering,” says 37-year-old Rose Beatriz Guballa, a member and Board Director of Tamaraw Salt Producers Cooperative (TAMACO) in the Philippines.

Insufficient iodine in diets causes irreversible mental and physical impairment, among other disabilities. TAMACO is iodizing salt in Occidental Mindoro, a major salt-producing province in the southern Philippines with about 3,500 salt farmers. Salt has a long history in Ms. Guballa’s family. She runs her family’s 30 year old salt farm with 280 employees in the small village of Magsaysay.

“GAIN has helped TAMACO solidify the fragmented salt production industry in Mindoro,” she asserts enthusiastically. “We are now moving as one voice representing our industry and have started strategizing as a community and even receiving sup-



**Rose Beatriz Guballa, a member and Board Director of Tamaraw Salt Producers Cooperative (TAMACO) in the Philippines**

port from the Provincial Government of Occidental Mindoro,” she says.

Since salt producers started working together, Ms. Guballa reports they have been looking into how they can improve their iodized salt production, both quality and

quantity-wise and be more competitive through economies of scale. After just eight months of operations, TAMACO reports some significant milestones. The salt cooperative has successfully facilitated the engagement of local salt producers with global experts in salt iodization and cooperative development and purchased more than 50,000 bags of iodized salt (about 2,500 metric tons) to potentially reach 600,000 people. It has also begun working with the Food and Drug Administration and the National Nutrition Council of the Philippines on promotion of iodized salt use.

TAMACO’s effort to stimulate demand for local salt has increased salt prices by 0.20 Philippine pesos (PhP) per kilo. As a result, the salt farmers and their families have seen an overall increase in their income by about 1,800,000 PhP per month (US\$ 41,000). The participative model is both contributing to local poverty reduction and decreases in iodine deficiencies.



*Salt farmer in Mindoro, the Philippines*

### Next Steps

TAMACO has identified a warehouse where members will be able to iodize, brand and package their salt in one place. It will soon begin iodizing the salt at this location and will then package it in small, affordable packets for consumers. Through support from GAIN and the Department of Sciences and Technology of the Philippines, members will be trained in how to set up quality control systems that accurately measure iodine levels in salt.

“We will also need to train our sales force on the importance of iodized salt for health so that they can convey the message to our clients,” emphasizes Ms. Gubala.

### Challenges

The cooperative’s principal challenge will be finding markets for its product, especially since the market is dominated by large-scale importers and traders. It plans to target food industries that use iodized salt in food manufacturing plants in order to reach a broader portion of the population.

“We are determined to find regular markets for our iodized salt,” says Ms. Gubala. She says TAMACO plans to give commissions and better price terms to traders who sell to their markets. The cooperative also lacks the proper salt processing equipment to serve the whole industry, relying primarily on the iodizing machines of its members.

Compliance is another challenge. Despite legislation, national data shows that only about 25 percent of household salt is iodized to government standards. TAMACO is supporting the implementation of the Philippines’ Act for Salt Iodization Nationwide (ASIN) as a member of the law’s Technical Working Group organized by the National Nutrition Council of the Philippines. The partnership between GAIN, the Government of the Philippines, ICCIDD and UNICEF aims to increase this coverage to 90 percent.