Sudan forges ahead to iodize more salt

Following extensive advocacy and support from IGN and partners in Sudan, in February this year the President of Sudan Omar al-Bashir opened the first state-of-the-art salt iodization factory in Port-Sudan, Red Sea Province, following accelerated multi-lateral efforts to bring adequately iodized salt to the country and eliminate iodine deficiency. Operating at full capacity, Al Shafie factory will be able to process up to 10 metric tons (MT) of salt per hour to meet almost a half of the country’s expected demand for iodized salt. In April, two more iodization plants were deployed in the Red Sea Province: Al Istijaba and Al Rasheed, each expected to produce up to 20,000 metric tons of iodized salt per year, bringing the total output to at least 85,000 MT.

In July, IGN Regional Coordinator for MENA/EMR, Dr. Izzeldin Hussein, travelled to Khartoum to follow up with the state Minister of Industry, Dr. Abdu Daud Suliman, and conduct a rapid assessment to verify whether the newly iodized salt is reaching retail outlets and households. With support from Dr. Widad Hassan, Director at the Industrial Research & Consultancy Center (IRRC), Dr. Hussein recruited a team of researchers to collect salt samples from three cities in Khartoum State: Khartoum, Khartoum Bahri (North), and Omdurman for analysis of iodine concentration. In total 1,000 salt samples (300 samples from the salt plants, 100 from packaging mills, 300 from markets/retailers, and 300 from households) were collected and transported to the Ministry’s laboratory, where they await analysis by titration.

Next stage: a new investment

To achieve 100% coverage of adequately iodized salt, Dr. Abdu Daud Suliman is in talks with potential investors, who are keen to support Sudan’s new public health agenda. He is positive that the remaining gap can be filled as early as in 2019. “We are very committed to achieving full population coverage with adequately iodized salt,” he reiterated.

Technical support, monitoring, and awareness

To help fast-track this process, IGN will continue working with all partners to facilitate technical training and knowledge transfer opportunities between Sudanese stakeholders and other countries, and support the Government and the industry to increase laboratory capacity and establish a robust system for monitoring the quality of iodized salt. Without ongoing monitoring to ensure that iodization practices comply with the legal standards, progress against iodine deficiency could quickly stall. But Dr. Suliman cites Sudan’s long-standing relationship with IGN as a reason to remain optimistic, and he credits Dr. Hussein with being a guiding force behind the recent progress. “We count on IGN to share their technical know-how and help us improve laboratory capacity, and increase awareness of the importance of eating iodized salt.”