A landmark food fortification summit in Tanzania

Festo Kavishe and Vincent Assey IGN Regional Coordinators for Eastern and Southern Africa

Building on the momentum generated by the 2015 Global Summit on Food Fortification in Arusha, the Government of Tanzania held its first-ever National Food Fortification Summit (NFF) in Dar es Salaam on 23–24th August 2017. IGN was among its co-conveners and played key facilitating and technical support roles. The summit was attended by over 100 participants, including several Ministers.

A review of fortification programs in Tanzania

Dr. Vincent Assey, then Assistant Director for Nutrition, MoHCDGEC, presented an overview of fortification strategies in Tanzania, citing iodine as the main fortificant in salt, and iron, zinc, vitamin A, folic acid and vitamin B12 as the main micronutrients added to flour and edible oils. Despite impressive progress, the 2015/16 Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) reported that micronutrient deficiencies persist, and fortification efforts must continue.

In a session dedicated to new investments in salt iodization, Dr. Daniel Nyagawa, Nutrition International (NI) Country Director, reported on the progress of a joint IGN and NI mission in 2016 to assess USI situation in Tanzania, which concluded in a list of recommendations and follow-up activities. A detailed report from this mission was published in IDD Newsletter 4/2017.

In addition to a discussion on USI, general recommendations were made on tackling malnutrition, which strongly support the achievement of IDD elimination, for example:

1. The Vice President should develop a “Nutrition Compact” with Regional Commissioners to ensure they mobilize and use local resources effectively to lower the rates of malnutrition in their regions and to support food fortification. This compact has been made possible with support of UNICEF and IGN.
2. Ensure that Local Government Authorities (LGAs) back and coordinate food fortification efforts as part of the national drive towards industrialization.
3. Raise public awareness of the importance of consuming fortified foods to promote consumer demand and producer supply.
4. Adopt food fortification logos (including the salt fortification logo) nationally to assist in identifying fortified foods and raise public awareness.
5. Strengthen the process of building better evidence and continuously monitor food fortification.
6. Increase investment in generating human capacity to improve enforcement of food fortification regulations, including salt iodization.
7. Develop laboratory capacity (e.g. of the Tanzanian Food and Nutrition Center and others) to analyze food fortification biomarkers (e.g. vitamin A, folic acid, iodine).
8. Raise awareness of the importance of food fortification among political leaders and policymakers.
9. Create an “enabling environment” for industry to fortify, including reviewing the tax regime imposed on premixes.
10. Seize on the high-level political commitment to further advance efforts towards food fortification.

Using market forces to drive salt iodization

Dr. Zuberi Segel representing the Tanzania Salt Producers’ Association (TASPA) presented on the role TASPA has played in preventing IDD through salt iodization. Because of the poor quality and high price of the local salt, the artisanal and small-scale salt producers cannot compete against the high-quality, well-packaged imported iodized salt from Kenya, India and Eritrea.

To support market forces, TASPA proposed several measures including (i) more Government campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of using iodized salt, (ii) stricter enforcement of the salt iodization regulations, and (iii) centralization/consolidation of iodization of salt produced by small-scale salt producers (SSSP).

To ensure that all locally produced salt is iodized, TASPA will take on the following tasks:

• Continue mobilizing salt producers country-wide, particularly the SSSPs, and train them in production of high-quality iodized salt. Training should also be given on the use of minilabs to measure iodine levels in salt.
• Use its Iodine Revolving Fund, established in 2014, to import and distribute KIO3. Make sure that there is sufficient stock of the chemical for distribution to all salt producers at any time.
• Advocate for salt to be treated as a food supplement and not as a mineral to help extricate salt from the hostile tax regime.
• Consult with the Government to keep KIO3 on the Essential Drug List.

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