

Ghana launches a new advocacy campaign on USI



Welcome address was delivered by Hon. Nii Lantey Vanderpuje – Ghana Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry.



Keynote address was given by Hon. Baba Jamal (in dark suit) – Ghana Deputy Minister of Local Government and Rural Development.

Samuel Gbogbo Nutrition Department, Ghana Health Service, Accra

A national launch of the new communication and advocacy campaign on universal salt iodization in Ghana was held in Accra on 10th October 2013. The launch was convened by the Nutrition Department/ Ghana Health Service, with funding from UNICEF, and included about 160 participants.

Objectives

- To sensitize stakeholders on iodized salt
- To solicit for support from stakeholders for Universal Salt Iodization program
- To launch the strategy as well as the communication and advocacy campaign on universal salt iodization.

Dr. Erasmus Agongo (Director, PPME/ Ghana Health Service) delivered the opening remarks. He mentioned that iodine deficiency is a serious bottleneck to national development because it affects the core of

development (i.e. human development). He also stated that although the strategy has been implemented for more than a decade and the relevant laws have been passed, the critical issues are the information gap in importance of consumption of iodized salt, as well as access, production and regulation. He concluded by stating that the launch of the new communication and advocacy strategy is a step to re-energize all stakeholders to play their key roles in eliminating IDD in Ghana.

The welcome address was delivered by the Hon. Nii Lantey Vanderpuje (Deputy Minister, Ministry of Trade and Industry). He stated that the launch of the communication strategy aims at sensitizing the public on the use of iodized salt and its health implications. He re-echoed His Excellency President John Mahama's concern on Ghana's achievement of Millennium

Development Goals 4 and 5 which are to Reduce Child Mortality and Improve Maternal Health by 2015 and stated that improved nutrition, including the consumption of iodised salt, will provide the necessary backbone in achieving these MDGs.

Solidarity Messages were delivered from UNICEF, the Canadian Embassy, WHO, GAIN and the ICCIDD Global Network, represented by the National Coordinator, Professor Ebenezer Asibey-Berko.

The keynote address was delivered by Hon. Baba Jamal (Deputy Minister, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development). He emphasized that USI involves iodization of all salt meant for human and livestock consumption, including salt used in food industries. He highlighted that iodine deficiency has serious health, economic and developmental effects.



USI in Ghana has major benefits for mother-child health

Based on the projected birth rates for the period 2011–2020, it is estimated that about 1.5 million children in Ghana will be affected by irreversible brain damage due to IDD if nothing is done about the current iodine deficiency situation. He stated that, considering that the mental impairment caused by iodine deficiency is permanent, in economic terms the present value of lost future wages due to iodine deficiency over this time period is about 668 million dollars.

Mr. Jamal mentioned that interventions that are being implemented include capacity building and provision of appropriate technical support to the salt industry,

establishing a monitoring mechanism to ensure effective and sustainable enforcement of regulations on quality iodized salt production and distribution, and public sensitization on the use of iodized salt. He stated that, in spite of several activities aiming to reach the target of 90%, only 35% of households in Ghana currently use adequately iodised salt.

To inform the population about the importance of consuming iodized salt, the communication campaign has been designed to run for a period of one year. The campaign will target consumers, salt producers, salt traders, law enforcement officials as well

as the District Assemblies who will henceforth spearhead communication activities for the attainment of USI. Mr. Jamal concluded by stating his hope that Ghana can mobilize the various sectors for coordinated and integrated action to achieve the target of 90% household consumption of iodized salt.

Airing of audio and video productions

Audio productions in four key Ghanaian languages (Ga, Akan, Ewe and Dagbani) as well as English and also a docudrama on iodized salt were played. These productions will be used during advocacy activities on Universal Salt Iodization.

The 'blue' pledge session

This session entailed representatives of various institutions pledging by steeping the palm of their hand in a blue paint and stamping their palm on a board as sign of support of the salt iodization program in Ghana.

Closing remarks

Dr. Erasmus Agongo (Director, PPME, GHS) in his closing remarks recommended that the launch should be replicated at regional and districts levels. Furthermore he stated that all regions and districts should hold media briefings on the strategy and provide information for local radio stations, including phone in radio discussions. He also emphasized the importance of the relevant bodies that will ensure enforcement of the regulation.