Renewing national efforts to control IDD in Cape Verde

Introduction
The republic of Cape Verde is an archipelago consisting of 9 islands situated in the Atlantic Ocean approximately 500 km from the Senegalese Coast. A 1996 survey found IDD was a public health problem in Cape Verde, with a goiter prevalence of 25.5%. Since then no IDD control activity has been reported. It is uncertain if Cape Verde has made progress to control IDD. Dr Ntambwe Kibambe traveled to Cape Verde in September 2007. His objective was to assess progress in the control of IDD and give recommendations to accelerate control activities.

Historical background
The 1996 survey, conducted with financial and technical support by WHO, found a national goiter prevalence of 25.5% in Cape Verde, with 74% of values for urinary iodine concentration (UI) <100 µg/L. The goiter prevalence was > 40% on Fogo Island, indicating severe iodine deficiency. Certain regions on the Islands of Santo Antao, Sao Nicolau, Santiago et Boa Vista also were severely iodine deficient, with a goiter prevalence of >30%. At that time, iodized salt was not available in Cape Verde.

In 1997, a feasibility study regarding salt iodization, supported by UNICEF, was conducted in Cape Verde. Following these recommendations, the process of implementing salt iodization was started in 1998 and included the following activities:
- Organization of a salt producer cooperative in Maio
- Support and input regarding salt iodization equipment in Pedra de Lume on the Island of Sal, and at the cooperative of Maio
- Education of employees at the production sites regarding iodization technique and control of iodization of salt in Sal and Maio
- Education of employees at the level of control: Health, Agriculture, and Customs
- Extension of capacities (equipment and education) of the laboratories of the sanitary delegation and education iodine dosage in salt
- Sensitization of the salt producers regarding the combat of IDD
- Sensitization of the population for the consumption of iodized salt

Cape Verde adopted the strategy of universal salt iodization with the signature of an official decree in September of 2002. This decree regulates the production, importation, exportation, commercialization and utilization of iodized salt for human and animal consumption. The iodization levels prescribed in the legislative text were:
- 50-80 ppm at local production sites and at export site
- 30-50 ppm at distributor and retail levels, as well as at the point of entry for imported salt

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Dr Ntambwe testing household salt in Praia (Santiago Island)
In 2004, an official decree revised the salt iodization levels downward, prescribing 20-40 ppm iodine at local production sites, for export, for sale at distribution or retail level and for import at the point of entry. In 2006, after two years of little progress, the coordination and resumption of IDD control activities was restarted by the National Nutrition Program of the Ministry of Health, which included visits at the production sites and multi-sectoral meetings to discuss a salt quality control system.

### Table 1: Proportion of households using iodized salt (Santiago Island)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health district</th>
<th>Households using iodized salt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Praia</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sao Domingos</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sao Miguel</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Willingness of the involved public sectors to collaborate (Health, Trade, Industry, Agriculture, Customs) in a multi-sectoral committee
- Existence of a production capacity for iodized salt to cover the national market as well as to respond to potential export demands
- Effective start of salt iodization at 3 production sites covering most of the national market
- Existence of laboratory capacities in the health delegations for the control of salt iodine level

### Weaknesses

- Absence of prescribed controls and punishment of misuse
- Weakness of multi-sectoral coordination
- Weak follow-up of the activities regarding the salt iodization strategy
- Termination of the activities regarding social mobilization
- Weak utilization of the national logo for iodized salt by the salt producers
- Utilization of expired kits for the control of iodized salt

### Opportunities

- Interest of the Office of Funds and Programs of the United Nations in Cape Verde to support the governmental efforts for the permanent elimination of IDD
- Availability of WHO to support reinforcement capacities in nutrition and epidemiological follow-up regarding the combat of IDD
- Existence of school canteens utilizing iodized salt for food preparation which is distributed to the children at their schools
- Support of national projects in the agro-nutritional field by volunteers of the United Nations, in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry
- A project to install a national reference laboratory including quality control of food products
- A women’s association that could incorporate female salt producers

#### The 2007 mission

On arrival, Dr. Ntambwe Kibambwe was warmly welcomed and received excellent cooperation from Dr. Irina Monteiro Spencer, Director of the National Nutrition Program, and Ana Paula Maximiano, Analyst for Reproduction Health and Nutrition at the United Nations Office for Funds and Programs. The tests of salt iodization in the households were conducted with the support of the Director of the National Nutrition Program, the Coordinator of the National Center for Health Development (CNDS), as well as designated physicians and nurses of the districts of Santa Cruz, Sao Domingos and Sao Miguel.

In order to assess the availability of iodized salt in Cape Verde, the sub-regional coordinator has tested salt samples of 126 households in 4 districts of Santiago Island using a rapid test kit. The results are shown in Table 1; 98.4% of households were using iodized salt.

The following observations on the Cape Verde IDD control program were made:

#### Strengths

- Existence of a legislative text regulating the production and commercialization of iodized salt for human and animal consumption
- Activities regarding Information, Education and Communication (IEC) of reproductive health, which could include promotion of iodized salt consumption

**Threats**
- Existence of isolated groups of women (heads of households) producing salt without iodization on Maio Island
- Open door for imported salt containing potassium iodide
- Absence of salt on the list of imported foods which are subjected to certification at customs

The results of the rapid tests of iodized salt in households on Santiago Island were presented and discussed. Recommendations and renewed commitment by all partners were made for progress toward the sustained elimination of IDD in Cape Verde. In his closing remarks, the Director General for Health thanked the participants for their renewed commitment to combat of IDD in Cape Verde. The local Coordinator of the United Nations Office for Funds and Programs promised support from her institute for the evaluation of IDD in 2008, as well as for the continuation of the activities regarding its permanent elimination in Cape Verde.

**Conclusions**

Cape Verde has made strong progress in the development of universal salt iodization strategy: a legal framework exists since 2002, iodized salt production is effective at 3 important sites covering most of the national market, and a variety of activities to promote consumption of iodized salt in all areas of the country has been done. Although the sampling was not representative for the whole country, the results of these preliminary tests indicate that almost all salt available in households is iodized.

For the renewal of IDD control efforts in Cape Verde the following are recommended:
- Assure a continuing campaign of communication to prevent IDD
- Ensure that female salt producers in the cooperative on Maio Island, as well as other small salt producers, iodize their salt
- Prohibit the circulation of noniodized salt outside the production sites
- Add salt to the list of imported agro-nutritional products subjected to certification
- Assure quality controls of iodized salt at production sites and throughout the cycle of commercialization

On September 7, 2007, Dr. Ntambo Kibambe presented the results of the mission at a multi-sectoral meeting organized by the Director General for Health. Prior to this, the results of the mission were also presented to the representative of the Office for Funds and Programs of the United Nations and the Representation Office of WHO in Cape Verde. It took place at the Ministry of Health and was chaired by the Director General for Health. Delegates of the following organizations participated: Directorate General of Trade, Directorate General of Industry, Inspection Service of Agriculture, Office of United Nations Funds and Programs, Reproductive Health, and the Association of Salt Producers.

- Apply the disciplinary measures in case of fraud
- Assist producers to install production equipment in order to provide salt which meets quality standards
- Reinforce multi-sectoral collaboration and partnership
- Integrate the promotion of consumption of iodized salt in households within the ongoing activities of the health districts
- Plan an epidemiological survey in 2008 including all districts in order to evaluate the progress achieved