

PERSONAL STORIES

An Indonesian policeman joins the fight against IDD

REMBANG, Indonesia, 13 November 2009 – Police officer Pak Sunandar has become expert in a skill not commonly practiced amongst law enforcement officers: iodine titration.

“I’m already used to doing this,” he says, swirling a beaker filled with purple fluid. Since 2006, Mr. Sunandar and his colleagues on the local law enforcement team have tested the level of iodine in salt samples from markets and salt producers in Indonesia’s Rembang District.



Mr. Sunandar was one of the founding members of Rembang’s Iodine Deficiency Disorders Task Force, a team that promotes universal salt iodization. He knows iodine deficiency is

the primary cause of preventable mental retardation and brain damage, having the most devastating impact on the brain of the developing fetus and young children in the first few years of life.

UNICEF and a diverse group of public- and private-sector organizations worldwide are working to eliminate iodine deficiency in Indonesia through universal salt iodization, an effective, low-cost intervention. In Rembang District, UNICEF has been supporting a major salt iodization drive since 2003 with the help of local authorities, who have managed the various initiatives to increase consumption and ensure compliance with iodization regulations.

One of the drive’s key goals is to raise community awareness through mass media channels, interpersonal communication and routine testing of salt in households, schools and small shops. Teams of local health volunteers have been invaluable to this effort. The volunteers go house to house to test salt supplies and hold monthly meetings at health clinics to teach mothers of young children about the benefits of iodized salt.

Under the guidance of the task force, Mr. Sunandar’s team tackles the supply side of the equation, enforcing the local law on mandatory salt iodization. At the beginning of its operation, in

2006, the team confiscated non-iodized salt from vendors in the market and replaced it with iodized salt. Vendors were also warned that the penalty for selling non-iodized salt can amount to \$5,000 in fines or up to three years in detention.



This approach led the district’s vendors to procure and sell only iodized salt in Rembang’s markets. The task force also provided technical assistance to Rembang’s salt producers and conducted regular testing of iodized salt at the points of production – thus ensuring that producers were following local laws.

Mr. Sunandar says he enjoys his job because he knows that iodized salt is necessary for the health and development of Rembang’s future generations. He has even traveled to other provinces to advise local authorities on salt iodization law enforcement.