

# Harmonization of salt iodization within nutrition programs in Africa

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With their focus on a single nutrient and vehicle, as well as their specific monitoring needs, salt iodization programs have been successfully scaled up as vertical programs.

But as salt iodization programs mature, they are likely to benefit from greater integration in nutrition strategies at national, regional, and global levels. In fact, this improved harmonization at different levels is already occurring in Africa.

## Regional harmonization efforts in Africa

The Micronutrient Initiative, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, UNICEF and Helen Keller International have engaged in a strategic partnership with the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) to develop regional solutions to salt iodization and food fortification programs in general. This five-year project, started in 2012, supports industries and national governments to increase

the consumption of fortified flour, cooking oil, and salt in an effort to reduce micronutrient deficiencies among vulnerable groups. Led by the WAEMU Commission, the partners were able to develop harmonized regional standards for iodized salt (1).

In East Africa, the East, Central, and Southern African Health Community (ECSA-HC) has passed a resolution to strengthen food fortification initiatives in the region in 2002. The aim of this initiative is to fast track the implementation of food fortification in the ECSA countries. ECSA-HC developed harmonized standards for vitamin A fortified oil and sugar, iron fortified wheat and maize flours, and salt iodization. In addition, guidelines and tools for internal and external QC/

QA, technical auditing and commercial inspection were also developed and disseminated in the region.

## National examples

The ultimate purpose of global and regional programs is to support program implementation through national programs. Over the two decades, the progress achieved with salt iodization in Africa has been remarkable.

The increased attention to nutrition as a key determinant for human capital and national development is likely to bring further opportunities for salt iodization and iodine control programs. Integrating IDD control programs into national action plans, while maintaining close monitoring of their performance, will render them more effective and sustainable.

For instance, in Kenya, salt iodization is part of the National Nutrition Action Plan. The roll out of this Action Plan is one of the key priorities for the national SUN initiative.

In Senegal, the government Cellule de Lutte Contre la Malnutrition (CLM) leads the implementation of the National USI Program. In this role, the CLM coordinates the inputs of development partners and ensures integration of IDD-related activities into the national nutrition program, thus enabling the IDD program to obtain regular program data.

## Reference

1. Kupka R, Ndiaye B, Jooste P. Regional standards on salt iodization in West Africa. *IDD Newsletter*. 2011;39:11-2.



Salt iodization is a critical component of maternal and child health programs © UNICEF/NYHQ2011