

Salt production and trade in Africa

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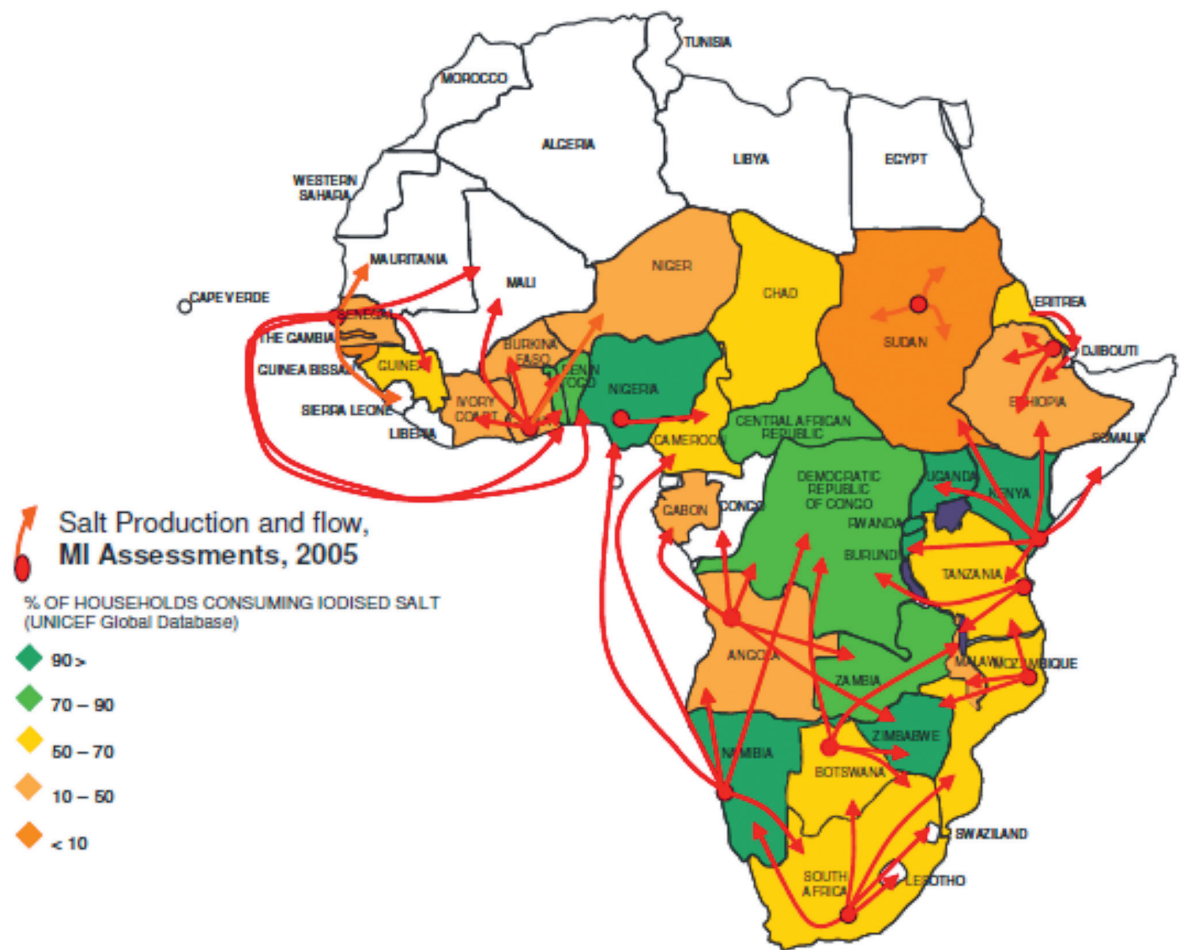


Figure 1 Main sources and the flow pattern of salt across Sub-Saharan Africa

Of around 181.5 million tons of global salt production, around 5 million tons is produced in Africa. Salt production techniques in many Sub-Saharan African countries are conventional and in some areas primitive. In Eritrea, there are two major government owned sea salt operations on the Red Sea coast and several privately-owned small and medium sized operations. In Ethiopia a cluster of small producers has grown around Afdera and Dobi in the Afar region that is

the source for the entire country. Kenya and Tanzania produce sea salt and inland lake and subsoil brine salt. Mozambique and Angola’s production is slowly gaining momentum.

There is almost no salt production in the entire Central and West African region except for Ghana and Senegal. These two countries meet the requirements of most of the region. Countries like Nigeria prefer to import their requirement of table salt from

outside the region – principally Namibia and South Africa but also from Australia, India and Brazil. South Africa, Namibia (*Photo 1*) and Botswana are the main sources of salt in southern Africa. The main sources and the flow pattern of salt across Sub-Saharan Africa are shown in Figure 1. This prompts the development of a regional strategy to ensure that salt is iodized at the production sources.

The following key challenges need to be addressed to move towards USI across the continent:

- To harmonize cross border trade in iodized salt, there is a need for governments across sub-regions (at a minimum) to agree on uniform iodization standards, removing trade barriers, build capacity and monitor programs.
- International agencies should continue advocacy at the highest political level, and capacity building of national and regional bodies.
- All producing countries must adequately iodise salt produced in their country with pre-shipment certification and entry port authentication. Salt producers should organize themselves as associations to effectively coordinate the USI efforts.
- In salt-importing countries legislation backed with adequate border control is important. Importing countries can apply pressure on salt producing countries to supply iodized salt.
- Where there is local production, competition in the market through abundant supply of lower grade salt results in lower prices of salt for producers which creates pressure to cut costs even by small fractions and iodization is usually the first cost cutting step.
- The cost of transportation often overshadows iodization costs and therefore small producers are able to compete only in local markets with non-iodized salt. Weak transport infrastructure also favours informal distribution networks. This creates opportunities for unscrupulous traders to collect salt from small producers and reach markets, which are not accessible by producers.
- There are regional barriers to trade which sometime prevent growth in the salt industry. This is seen in West Africa where the trade between Anglophone and Francophone countries is restricted through economic policies and this limits the marketability of salt produced in Senegal and Ghana.
- Iodization technology is not a standalone step. It should match the production setup and be integrated into production process. Producer ownership has to be created through a contribution by the producer for the units or technical services. When paid for, it will be maintained



Photo 1: These colorful salt pans in Namibia supply iodized salt to many African countries

and used with responsibility.

- Small producers can form collectives and make their business more profitable, which in turn leads to growth. Cooperatives need a horizontal support model that includes training and business development services like microfinance, branding and marketing of salt, improved resource utilization and reduced wastage.
- An assured and consistent supply of potassium iodate is key to the success of an iodized salt program.

Every country has own unique system of salt production, distribution and consumption. Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, and Tanzania are the ten key salt producing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The salt produced in these countries has a wide reach and potential to make the greatest impact on iodized salt coverage in the region.