

Positioning salt iodization within SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) programs in Africa

Greg Garrett Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), Geneva, Switzerland



Rising SUN programs in Africa should integrate USI

The Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, or SUN, is an initiative founded on the principle that all people have a basic right to good nutrition. It brings together key representatives from governments, civil society, the United Nations, donors, businesses and researchers in a collective effort to improve nutrition. Forty-three countries have now committed to the SUN movement.

Within SUN, national leaders are prioritizing efforts to address malnutrition including USI. Participating countries are ensuring that effective policies are in place, collaborating with partners to implement USI programs with shared goals, and mobilizing resources to effectively scale up salt iodization. For example, in Zambia, the National Food and Nutrition Commission, has developed a national SUN work plan that maps and costs all nutrition-sensitive interventions under implementation or being planned in the country.

Another boost for USI through the SUN Movement is occurring through the SUN Business Network (SBN), that was launched in December 2012. SBN enables

businesses to align with the priorities of national governments as they increase their investments in nutrition.

The SUN Business Network works in a number of African countries to:

- map entry points for business in national SUN plans
- convene meetings with business leaders (local and global) in-country with SUN country multi-stakeholder platforms
- stimulate partnerships with agreed areas of common interest.

In Kenya in January 2013, the first convening of the business community was attended by 50 of the key business leaders, from a wide cross section of the private sector including the salt industry. The industry leaders present at the event focused on the need to work within an existing industry lead group to create a groundswell, and nominated the Kenya National Food Fortification Alliance to become the focal group for this. Over the coming year, the Food Fortification Alliance will aim to ensure active participation of the food processing industry, including salt businesses, in ensuring better nutrition in Kenya.

In Nigeria in late 2012, the first convening of SBN in Nigeria was held under the title “Seeking the Commitment of the Private Sector in Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) in Nigeria”. Professor Ngozi Nnam, President of the Nutrition Society of Nigeria shared an assessment of the impact of iodine deficiency in Nigeria estimated at \$1.12 billion losses annually. The dialogue ended with business participants making a number of commitments to supporting nutrition in Nigeria.

Through the SUN Movement including the SBN, salt iodization to correct IDD is being placed clearly on the national agenda of governments with constructive dialogue occurring between civil society, donors, businesses and researchers.

A strong enabling environment for salt iodization

Experience gained from over twenty years of salt iodization programming shows that an enabling environment consisting of political commitment, a well functioning regulatory mechanism and a strong partnership of key stakeholders, in particular, the salt industry, predict success. The different stakeholders – government, salt traders and producers, public health authorities, with support of agencies and donors – need to work together with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This partnership is the foundation of national coordination of salt iodization programs.