

Tracking the progress of IDD elimination in Egypt

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On August 20–28, a meeting of Egypt's IDD Coalition was held in Cairo. The meeting's main objectives were (i) to secure technical support for Egypt during the preparation for the 2014 National Survey and ensure the Iodine Global Network's (IGN) future involvement, (ii) to encourage policy makers and program managers to accelerate IDD elimination and promote USI, (iii) to coordinate a meeting with the salt industry, and (iv) to discuss plans for social marketing and promotion of iodized salt.

Background

Historically, ICCIDD played a major role in establishing the IDD elimination/USI program in Egypt. This included the provision of training and technical support to the salt industry, and program management. The history of ICCIDD's work in Egypt dates back to 1997, to the first meeting with the representatives of the salt industry to promote salt iodization and provide technical assistance. ICCIDD, in collaboration with UNICEF, conducted the first national USI survey in 2005 and then the first national urinary iodine survey in 2007. Also in 2007, the annual ICCIDD Board meeting was held in Cairo, during which the establishment of the IDD secretariat was proposed. The secretariat was subsequently set up in 2008 with technical support from ICCIDD and financial support from UNICEF. Managed by the Egyptian National Coordinator of the Iodine Global Network, the secretariat plays a vital role in coordinating and tracking the progress of the IDD

elimination program. Recently, the secretariat has been overseeing the new National Survey, which began in September thanks to the financial support from GAIN and UNICEF. A visit from IGN's Regional Coordinator, Dr. Izzeldin Hussein, was desirable to provide technical support to the survey team, and to meet with policy makers, the Scientific Committee, and the salt industry.

Meeting with the Scientific Committee

A meeting was held with Dr. Imad Izzat from the Ministry of Health and Population. Dr. Izzat is the primary investigator of the National Survey. The meeting included the Scientific Committee, as well as the Executive and Advisory Committees, including representatives of UNICEF, WHO, IGN, and WFP.

On the second day, a workshop was held at the Ministry of Health. The workshop was conducted by the Undersecretary of Health and attended by representatives from WHO, UNICEF, WFP, and GAIN. Other attendees included the Chair of Healthcare and Nursing, the Head of the National Institute of Nutrition, and the Head of Mother and Child Care Directorate.



Egypt's IDD coalition meeting was held in Cairo on 20–28 August, 2014.

The workshop focused on discussing the findings and implications of a recent key paper on the assessment of iodine nutrition in populations (1).

The meeting participants were informed about the new IGN structure, the role that IGN would play to coordinate the efforts of agencies, and the technical support that it would provide to countries committed to IDD elimination. This was followed by the discussion of the paper and IGN's efforts to update the technical aspects of program monitoring and evaluation. The discussion then moved on to issues pertaining to technical matters, such as survey design, survey methods and appropriate indicators, work coordination, and the expected outcomes.

The participants were keen to discuss the emerging issues, such as the benefits and feasibility of collecting repeat urine samples, and also issues pertaining to the reduction of salt, and the integration between salt iodization and salt reduction programs, and ways to determine and set the correct iodization levels once the consumption of salt decreases.

The second and third meetings were with the representatives of the salt industry and the team responsible for promotion and social marketing. During the meetings, the salt industry brought up the issue of quality control procedures, which have been extensively promoted by IGN and GAIN (*see Box*).

During the meeting, IGN recommended and requested that urinary iodine concentration (UIC) is also measured in pregnant women. This recommendation was commended by UNICEF, which agreed to provide financial support, to complement the technical support from IGN. The meeting also discussed the need to set up an approved laboratory in the country, which could carry out the testing of urine samples and monitor the quality of iodized salt. A team of lab experts will submit a technical and financial proposal to UNICEF and GAIN.

Conclusions

The National Survey began in September and is scheduled to end by mid-March 2015. Training of field staff took place in mid-September and lasted two weeks, followed by a pilot study in the third week of September. The collection and analysis of biological samples began in October and is scheduled to continue through December, followed by data entry and analysis in January 2015 and a draft report by the end of February. This visit and meeting turned out to be crucial in ensuring that IGN's essential technical expertise is utilized in the survey.

References

1. Zimmermann, MB and Andersson, M. Assessment of iodine nutrition in populations: past, present, and future. *Nutrition Reviews*. 2012; vol. 70(10): 553–570

Introducing Quality Management practices among iodized salt processors and repackers in Egypt

The GAIN–IGN Universal Salt Iodization (USI) Project held the first workshop with national stakeholders of Egypt's salt industry in 2009, identifying the need to further coordinate and increase efforts with the salt industry to improve the supply of quality iodized salt. The first Quality Management (QM) workshop was held in 2013 to develop with key partners a set of standard national guidelines for quality management in the iodized salt industry. As a follow-up to this workshop, and to promote further efforts toward Quality Management, a Working Group meeting was held on Tuesday, August 12, in Cairo. The aim was to facilitate a discussion between the GAIN–IGN technical experts and the repackers/processors, who are eager to introduce better quality management practices and explore with the factory staff the key challenge areas, and tailor the designs of effective quality systems for each factory.

During the previous months, gap analyses and report cards were developed for each of the factories by the QM Egypt team. The results were discussed at the meeting, and the groups were divided into working groups to discuss the relevant Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) and the means by which the factories could achieve them with further support from the QM Egypt team within the allotted timeframe and resources. The re-assembled group then concluded on key recommendations and next steps for QM activities in each type of factory. Visits were made to several factories to get a sense of the achievements attained on the ground to date. There is a sense of great optimism and enthusiasm amongst the salt companies and the expectation that this activity will have a positive impact on the quality of iodized salt in Egypt and, thus, the livelihoods of Egyptians.



There is enthusiasm and optimism about the future of USI in Egypt.