

**Network for Sustained Elimination of Iodine Deficiency
Minutes of the Board Meeting
July 31, 2007**

Welcome and Chairman's Report

The Chair, Alan Court, opened the Board Meeting of the Iodine Network with reflections of the previous day's Consultative Meeting on IDD Elimination in China and field visit to the Beijing Salt Distribution Centre. Alan also extended thanks to China Salt for hosting the Board dinner the previous evening as well as inviting the Network's Board to hold its meeting in Beijing.

Alan noted that although Walter Becky, the Network's Vice-Chair, was unable to attend due to conflicting commitments, the two had a discussion prior to the Board Meeting. Walter agreed to engage in discussion with EU Salt, China Salt and, of course, the Salt Institute, about the private sector contribution to the Network. Walter will report back to Alan about this by the end of August.

In his remarks Alan also bid a farewell to Bruno de Benoist, WHO, who is retiring but indicated that the Director of Nutrition at WHO has sent a letter reinforcing their commitment to the Network.

CDC was also absent from the meeting, Bill Dietz, had to cancel out of the meeting at the last minute due to a family emergency. And finally, Rob Parker from Kiwanis International sends also his regrets.

In his report Alan noted IDD achievements to date: 120 countries have national salt iodization programs, at least 34 countries have reached the USI goal and over 60 countries have made progress towards reaching universal salt iodization.

The next phase of IDD progress needs to focus on the priority countries. If the 16 or so countries, characterized by the highest number of unprotected infants and major salt producers, achieve USI then the global average of house hold consumption of iodized salt will rise to 85%.

As was noted at a Regional Consultation on IDD/ USI in Jaipur, progress has been made in a number of countries including Afghanistan, India, Pakistan as well as Bangladesh. Plans are being made for further workshops in East and Southern Africa as well as the Middle East later in the year.

Sustainability is the key, of course as lessons from India and Bolivia have shown, where government focus has eased, it opened the door for backsliding. So, the challenge is to make sure that USI stays on national agendas. There are other challenges that the Network Members are addressing such as situations of excess iodine intake, the impact of increased consumption of processed foods and the role of small producers in national USI programs. These are all issues to be discussed at the meeting.

Alan concluded his remarks by stating that the Network is a special entity and its members are not only dedicated to the cause of eliminating ID but also vital to seeing that goal realized.

Following this report the agenda as presented in the meeting documents was accepted. As the items arising from the last meeting minutes would be covered off in the Secretariat Up-date, the meeting proceeded to the next agenda item.

Network Secretariat Up-Date

In her presentation, Network Coordinator, Lucie Bohac, followed up on the progress and the Secretariat's support in the program focus areas of Communication & Advocacy; Information Sharing, Documentation and Tracking; Priority National Actions; and Network Common Actions.

On Communication and Advocacy, Lucie noted that while a date for UNGASS II had been set for December 10 & 11, 2007, plans for the Network's involvement in the event cannot be developed until there is further elaboration as to the format and focus the event will take.

Lucie asked for guidance as to the approach/ strategy the Network takes with respect to Priority Countries so that she may amend the current information on the Network's website.

With respect to the Network conducting country assessments, Lucie noted a number of issues raised through discussion with the members of the Network Common Actions Working Group (see Board Meeting Binder Tab #3) and asked the Board for guidance on these matters.

In addition, the Network has not undertaken specific follow up to the Haiti Advocacy Mission which took place November 2006, and Lucie asked for guidance on moving forward with this item.

Finally, Lucie noted that funding for the Network Secretariat has been secured for the next year.

In the discussion that followed the presentation, it was agreed that all Network members should re-focus on the prevention of brain damage rather than stress information about goiters and cretinism – as the central and urgent issue around IDD communication and advocacy. Brain development and damage, which is externally invisible, forms the larger base of the IDD triangle (see W. Schultink presentation on July 30/07). With 1.7 billion people at risk, it is a greater danger than the tip of the triangle, the much smaller in magnitude but visible disorder of cretinism.

Linking the quality of human capital/ development to economic implications will strengthen the message about the importance of combating IDD.

With respect to China, it was agreed that getting the message of brain development and damage on the agenda was critical.

It was agreed that getting a focus on IDD/ USI in other publications will not only reinforce the Network's messages but also expand the audiences the Network wishes to engage.

A number of publications were identified as potential venues for IDD focus and should be contacted for possible features:

SCN special issue was identified.
Lancet Series.

Food Quality has received increasing media attention, linking food quality with IDD/ USI issues may be a way to also get the message out.

It was agreed that the country assessments should proceed and the Network should consider being pro-active in getting some countries to request assessments.

Although a number of suggestions for follow up to the Haiti Mission have been made (from buying up all of the poor grade locally produced salt and importing high quality iodized salt to fortifying flour with iodine), no progress has been made to develop the next steps by the Network.

Glen suggested that flour fortification has seen success in Haiti, perhaps adding iodine may be a possible approach.

A dedicated working group was assembled to review the suggested actions and develop the go-forward plan. Haiti Working Group members include: Werner (UNICEF), Venkatesh (MI), Tina (WFP), Justus (EU Salt), David (ICCIDD).

It was agreed that the Network website should be amended to report what Network members are doing in Priority Countries, and highlight how this

relates to the conditions that makes a country a “priority country”.

Also with respect to priority countries, it was noted that China has an increasing role in Africa.

Action: Network Up-date:

Follow Up on UNGASS II

Alan, Werner, Jack and Lucie to review developments and plans and engage the Communication & Advocacy Working Group as concrete details become available. **Follow up by August 31, 2007.**

Communications

David Hipgrave and Lilian Selenje (UNICEF China), China Salt and Chen Zupei (ICCIDD) to follow up on focusing on brain development and damage as a critical IDD focus in China. **Feedback on progress by October 31, 2007.**

Venkatesh to follow up with the SCN by **September 31, 2007.**

Werner to follow up with the November issue of the Lancet series. Alan to follow up with the Lancet Series at the Bellagio meeting by **October 31, 2007.**

Glen, CDC, WHO and Tina to follow up with an outline of an approach that the Network can consider with respect to the link to food quality. Link with the Food and Nutrition Bulletin. **Follow up by September 30, 2007.**

Country Assessments

Yes, country assessments will be undertaken. Lucie/ Secretariat to follow up and coordinate with Members (WHO< ICCIDD & UNICEF) with respect to assembling an assessment team and undertaking the individual assessments. **Follow up on-going.**

Haiti Mission

Haiti Working group (Werner, Venkatesh, Tina, Justus and David) to follow up by **September 31, 2007.**

Also, Glen is to act as liaison with respect to Seabord regarding flour fortification.

Venkatesh and Alan will follow up with the possibility of engaging the Canadian Governor General and Canada. **Follow up by September 31, 2007.**

Strategy for Priority Countries

Lucie to follow up on modifying the website regarding the pages on priority countries **by October 31, 2007**.

vii. China's International Development Support

UNICEF CHINA and China Salt to follow up with the Vice Minister of MOH, China, with respect to discussions of China's support for IDD elimination in Africa, (ie. in priority countries like Sudan and Angola) as well as food imports to the South Pacific. **Follow up by August 31, 2007**.

3. Review of the Use of Iodized Salt in Processed Foods

Justus de Jong presented an overview of the study he had undertaken. Members agreed that not only is this an important study and issue to understand, but that the report was comprehensive and signaled that it was time to give this issue its due attention.

In the process of completing the review and in the planning for making it public, it was agreed that a number of issues need to be addressed:

It was agreed that with any communication about this review, the Network would want to emphasize that adding iodine to the processed foods does not harm the food in any way.

The analytical methods used in the studies to assess the impact of adding iodine to processed foods should be reviewed.

Also important to note that the role of processed foods will be manifest differently in three markets: developing countries, countries with economies in transition and industrialized countries.

There needs to be a means by which the Network could assess the impact of adding iodine to processed foods as a means of getting iodine nutrition to the population. This would then also inform what actions the Network should take in relation to promoting the use of iodized salt in processed foods.

To complete the review, it was agreed that there needs to be a component of the report that addresses the public health implications of using iodized salt in processed foods.

The Network remains USI focused as its central position but in cases where legislation does not provide the legal requirement for iodization and countries have not yet established USI, it was agreed that the Network advocate to food companies that all edible salt needs to be fortified with iodine.

Also for future consideration is how the processed foods industry can be involved in national coalitions, in support of USI.

Furthermore, UNICEF indicated they would support a meeting that could explore the use of iodized salt in processed foods as a CSR approach, particularly in industrialized countries, and this would be an opportunity to engage WHO Europe in the discussion.

The matter of how the use of iodized salt in processed foods is included in the Network's Country Assessments of USI achievement needs to be addressed.

Post completion of this study, the Network Board agreed to the following next steps:

Finalization of the report (with public health implication included) and plans for publication of the report

Establishing a dialogue with the processed foods industries, including discussions on CSR

Future discussion on of how iodine content in processed foods impacts upon imports of these foods

Further consideration of how the processed foods industry may play a part in national coalitions.

Action:

Alan and Lucie to follow up with Cargill to see if we can enlist their assistance on this. CDC and WHO should be involved in follow up of the review of analysis methodologies. **Follow up with Cargill by October 31, 2007.**

Follow up on the public health implications will be lead by Venkatesh and include CDC and WHO, as well as Justus. **Follow up by November 31, 2007.**

Lucie to add a reference for the use of iodized salt in processed foods to the country assessment process. **Follow up by October, 2007.**

4. Excess Iodine

The discussion on excess iodine focused on three different contexts:
WFP's specifications for iodine in salt provided under its food relief program,
Situations where legislated iodine content in salt in a given country is above the WHO recommended amounts,
Specific instances of excess iodine which may have other explanations.

While the context of this issue was given in reference to refugees in Africa, it was noted that excess iodine issues have come up elsewhere, including in China which ended up adjusting its mandated iodine levels to deal with the

resulting health implications. However, the Members were reminded that iodine deficiency poses a problem of far greater magnitude than excess iodine.

In terms of Network guidance for WFP, it was agreed that WFP should feel free to adapt and reduce its specifications for iodine content in salt (which is currently maintained at a higher rate) because the loss rate of iodine from production to consumption has decreased.

With reference to instances of legislation requiring a high level of iodine in salt, as in the case of Kenya, the discussion concluded that while getting Kenyan legislation to be modified to lower the required iodine content has been a slow process, there are indications that the message has been received and the matter is being addressed.

So that the Kenyan authorities receive further reinforcement that persistently high iodine levels need to be corrected and come in line with WHO standards, it was suggested that the up-coming country assessment of Kenya's USI achievement address this issue as well.

ICCIDD presented a short guideline on Excessive Iodine Intake (by Hans Burgi) as a tool in addressing cases of excess iodine that arise in different circumstances.

Members agreed that Table 2: Causes and Management of Endemic Iodine Excess, in the Burgi paper, provides good guidance on the matter, noting that a study on at a population level is also important to understand if the excess is an isolated situation or, in fact, a larger scale issue.

Action: Excess Iodine

Tina to follow up on WFP's modifications to its iodine level specifications.

Lucie to ensure the country assessment team for Kenya are aware of this Network Board discussion on the issue. **Follow up as appropriate.**

5. Sustainable Support to Small Producers

Venkatesh and Luc presented a follow up to the initial paper on support to small producers that was first introduced at the Atlanta Board Meeting. The presentation provided a menu of supports to small salt produces as well as documented country examples to show how these kinds of supports work.

Discussion focused on the role of small salt producers in the USI strategy, the sustainability of supporting small producers and the benefits of taking this comprehensive support approach.

The premise for supporting small salt producers is set in the context of a global gap of 30% (of households world-wide with access to and use of iodized salt) that needs to be filled to ensure the USI goal has been reached; and of the reality that these small producers do exist, are suppliers of salt and, as such, have a place in the salt market (even if informal). De facto, they impact upon the household consumption of salt and the quality of their product will impact upon the ability to iodize the salt. By bringing them into better focus and attention with comprehensive support, their product can be improved (salt will become of higher quality for adequate iodization) and they can be properly monitored as part of the salt producing sector, and required to iodize their salt. Ultimately, they would contribute to the USI goal and reaching the final 30%.

One of the issues raised is the risk of interference with natural market forces of the salt sectors as well as the dependence of small producers it may create. It was noted that the issue of supporting small producers must recognize that using a business delivery system (salt being a consumable product) to address a public health concern (IDD) will bring into seeming conflict the two different approaches. There is recognition that it is important to avoid intervening with the natural progress of business development/ failure in a given industry, however, the support to small producers is intended as an interim measure. In certain countries, the alternative would be to provide iodine supplementation while waiting for the consolidation of the salt industry to happen.

A key question posed was: what will be done differently in the proposed plan to avoid the pitfalls of the past?

The answer lay in:

understanding who and where these salt producers are by mapping their locations, one can see what market they impact (population as well as leakage into the formal salt marketplace);
accessing small producers and their operations enables their education, training, as well as access to processing materials be it packaging, equipment or consumables;
introduction of these small producers into a more formal market place facilitates monitoring of the quality of their products as well as their compliance to USI;
introduction of sustainability mechanisms such as access to revolving micro-credit to enable small producers in their business.

With reference to the “exit strategy” of the supports to small producers, there was some concern that the time frame was optimistic. It was recommended that this be looked at as a follow up to the presentation.

Discussion concluded with an acknowledgement that this is an important undertaking and underlines the need to understand, in each country where this strategy is being considered, what proportion of the human salt consumption market is held by these small salt producers. Once this is clear, then it will

determine the relative effort needed to support the small producers.

In addition, raising the quality of the product is key, thus the next steps should consider if the level of monitoring proposed in the plan be built up at a national level.

Finally, as a follow up, Venkatesh proposed that there be a joint effort with UNICEF and MI to work towards a standard operating guideline relating to in-country work regarding small producers.

Action:

Venkatesh and Luc to follow up with the possible development of a national or international standard to identify benchmarks for small producers to achieve the quality required in their product

Venkatesh and Luc to also look into further definition of “small producer”, especially in consideration of the above point.

MI and partners (UNICEF, WFP etc) to follow up with the proposed development of a guideline for in-country use.

Follow up to these items is to be brought forward to the next meeting.

6. IDD in Europe

It was agreed that the Network should endeavor to keep the issue on IDD in Europe on the agenda.

To lay the ground work for a potential meeting on IDD in Europe, the following next steps were discussed:

ICCIDD to bring up the issue at the Thyroid Association Meeting in September 2007, with specific reference to newborn screening.

Jack will speak with Marc Danzon, Regional Director WHO Europe

Glen to informally tap into the representatives at the FFI meeting in Brussels in November 2007.

If there is interest and engagement for a potential meeting, the Network will explore the possibility of holding such a meeting. **This item to be brought forward to the next Board Meeting.**

7. Iodine Nutrition Interventions

Following discussion of the proposed policy paper (arising from a technical meeting convened by WHO and UNICEF), a number of technical issues were raised, in particular concern about the proposed 400 mg/ yr supplementation for

pregnant women. If given from the 2nd trimester or later, the outcomes are not positive.

Action:

Glen and Tina to follow up with UNICEF on the technical issues before the paper is re-circulated to Network Members for review and adoption as a Network guideline. **Follow up by October 30, 2007.**

Proposed change in title of this guideline is: "Network Guidance on Ensuring Iodine Nutrition in All Situations".

8. Budget and Member Contributions

Lucie presented the budget as approved by the current funding agreement, noting that it fell short of the anticipated budget and, therefore, Network activity initially presented in Atlanta.

Discussion followed regarding tracking in-kind contributions as well as collaborative ventures on specific issues between Network members that fill the gaps, such as the WHA initiative.

There was a general agreement that there remains a need for more generic financial contributions and Alan reminded that Walter will be getting back to him with reference to the private sector contributions.

Action:

Walter to report back to Alan regarding private sector contributions, **Follow up by August 31, 2007.**

Lucie to follow up with tracking in-kind and collaborative contributions. **Follow up on-going.**

9. Next Meeting

The Next meeting will be held in Geneva., Switzerland. The tentative timing has been set for the week following the WHO Executive Board, and so, Members have been asked to earmark the last week of January 2008 for the next meeting.

Key issue is to ensure we have WHO participation.

Also, it was suggested that a side meeting relating to IDD in Europe would be a possible add on. In that context, inviting salt producers from Russia and

perhaps also from India may be appropriate.

Action:

To finalize the date, Alan will follow up with Catherine Le Galès-Camus, Assistant Director-General, WHO. **Follow up by September 30, 2007.**

One final note was made, that the Salt Symposium to be held in Beijing in 2009, will include a special focus on IDD.

Meeting was adjourned.

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