



Network for Sustained Elimination of Iodine Deficiency

Report of Board Meeting
9-10 January 2003
Washington Dulles

10 February 2003

Board members present:

J. Werner Schultink (UNICEF), M.G. Venkatesh Mannar (MI), Walter W. Becky (Salt Institute), Jack C.S. Ling (ICCIDD), L. Nettles Brown (Kiwanis International), Lin Jiahua (China National Salt), Robert J. Baldwin (CDC), Glen F. Maberly (Emory University).

Absent with apology:

Jan W.F. van Ingen (ESPA), Bruno de Benoist (WHO)

Secretariat:

Frits van der Haar

In attendance:

Rainer Gross (UNICEF), Richard Hanneman (Salt Institute), Sunny Kim (PAHO), Jacky Knowles (CDC), Marc van Ameringen (MI), Nita Dalmiaya (UNICEF), John Dunn (ICCIDD), Zhang Yanmei (China National Salt)

1. Approval of agenda

The draft agenda was approved, with small amendments on the sequence.

2. Approval of report from the previous Board meeting

The meeting agreed that the agreed-upon guideline for conducting an “Assessment of National Progress toward Optimum Iodine Nutrition” should be attached and considered as integral part of the report of the previous Board meeting.

The report of the Board meeting held in New York was approved.

3. Assessment of National Progress

Despite the recognition that conducting an assessment often requires complex arrangements, the meeting felt that the conduct of assessments should be accelerated. The Board discussed the steps in the process and decided that upon receipt of an official Government request, the Chairman would notify ICCIDD (Executive Director John Dunn) and ask it to approach all Network members for their nomination of members on a team. Since each assessment confronts a unique national situation, each proposed team would need to be composed of a unique set of competence. Nettles Brown (Kiwaniis International) asked for a detailed description of the educational experience and other requirements for each team member in each case. The Board felt that each member should be consulted for each proposed mission.

The Chairman emphasized that the process of nomination should be open for inputs by every member organization and be conducted transparently. The overall aim for the Network is to gather experience of assessments, while exploring support mechanisms for national review of goal accomplishment, and contributing to building the elements for sustainability. After a number of assessments, the Board should review the experience and the lessons learnt. The Board resolved that the laid down procedure should be observed as much as possible in each case.

Venkatesh Mannar (MI) mentioned that the WHO regional office in Eastern Mediterranean is putting together a Task Force to define procedures for national assessments. The Board recommended that MI communicates the agreed-upon guidelines to the regional office and asks that the effort would be connected to the Network assessments. Nettles Brown (Kiwaniis International) recommended that each assessment should also look specifically at achievements related to the plans and commitments made in the past.

As to next steps in specific requests, the Board made the following decisions:

Macedonia: The Board approved of an assessment. The Network Chairman will decide on a team composition and send a proposed Terms of Reference to the UNICEF country office in Skopje.

Peru: The Board tentatively approved of an assessment and asked UNICEF to request the “list of 6 things” as described in the procedure, Step I.

Paraguay: The Board was informed that the Minister of Health had decided that his initial request would not further be considered.

Thailand: An official request has been received through UNICEF Bangkok. The Board tentatively approved of an assessment and asked that UNICEF would assemble the “list of 6 things” to be shared with the Network prior to inviting comment and nominations for a team.

Federated Republic of Yugoslavia: The information on progress was focused on only one (Serbia) out of the three federations. UNICEF would write to the country office and ask for recent information of the situation in Montenegro and Kosovo.

Zimbabwe: The emergency situation doesn't seem to have improved sufficiently to proceed. UNICEF keeps contacts through the Representative in Harare.

4. Election of Officers

The Chairman introduced the subject by announcing that he is leaving his current position at UNICEF headquarters to take up the post of Health and Nutrition Officer in UNICEF New Delhi. The senior

leadership of UNICEF has expressed a strong desire to continue providing the Chair. UNICEF proposed that Rainer Gross, UNICEF Chief of Nutrition, would succeed as Chairman. The Board unanimously approved.

The Vice-Chairman offered that this position be discussed. He stated that he would welcome an offer by salt industry members to broaden the base of leadership. MI proposed that Walter Becky, President of Morton Salt and SI member, would succeed as Vice-Chairman. The Board unanimously approved.

5. Next meeting of a Network Summit

As discussed by the first Network Summit in January 2001 in Paris, a Summit of Leaders would be held every 3-5 years, with the purpose to review the experience in elimination worldwide, confirm continued progress toward the goal, and guide the future policy of the Network. On request by the Chairman, Jack Ling (ICCIDD) had explored the interests in China to host a Summit in 2003, coincident with a national high-level re-advocacy meeting. The reasons for proposing a Summit in China is that China's progress is a significant part in the global goal achievement, the China experience provides leadership by example and there are many lessons to be learnt from the political process in China. The Chairman informed the Board that UNICEF is committed to the idea of holding a Summit in China, should agreement be forthcoming from Chinese leaders.

Jack Ling (ICCIDD) reported on his findings of the many meetings held with leaders of Government, industry and others in Beijing as well as provinces. There appears strong interest among all partners in China in the idea of dovetailing a Summit with a national re-advocacy meeting in 2003. Mr Lin (China Salt) confirmed the report and informed the meeting that the Minister of Health, who is the agreed-upon national focal point for IDD elimination, held a four-department meeting on 26 December 2002 to lay out the strategic approach to (a) consolidate the gains made of >95% salt iodization, (b) improve supplies in areas that are presently underserved, and (c) assure continued commitment at highest political level. The Minister welcomes the idea of a Network Summit in China in 2003, and requests the Executive Director of UNICEF to write a letter proposing it. Mr Lin mentioned that a Re-advocacy-cum-Summit meeting in China might also be of benefit for other countries in the region. China National Salt has started making initial preparations for a Summit.

The Board enthusiastically approved the idea of holding a Network Summit in Beijing in 2003 and made the following recommendations:

- (a) Although the channel of communication is through the MOH, efforts should be made, supported through Partners, to ensure involvement of the State Council
- (b) UNICEF to consult its Representative on how to proceed with an official letter by the Executive Director that proposes the Summit
- (c) Approach UNESCO or other appropriate bodies to ask their participation and connect the success of protecting the developing brains of newborns in China with the notion of better educability
- (d) See how the Summit and National Re-advocacy Event could benefit surrounding countries. And example would be that UNICEF, with consent by China, issues the invitations to attend.

Rainer Gross (UNICEF) committed to work for a letter from the Executive Director of UNICEF to China to propose the holding of a Summit, concurrent with the planned re-advocacy event.

6. Current Network business

- Follow-up from Miami meeting

The multimedia CD-Rom report has been produced and disseminated among participants, shared through member networks throughout the region, and posted on the Network website.

For discussion on formation of National Coalitions, see agenda item 8 below.

- Current plans in Latin America & Caribbean

UNICEF and SI are collaborating on conducting salt situation analyses in the Dominican Republic and Guatemala, with Haiti considering. The aim is to use the information as an input into a national review of the policy strategy and provide an impetus to reach the UNGASS goal on time by stronger and possibly re-oriented national efforts.

- Country proposals through UNICEF

Nita Dalmiya presented an overview on funding needs, estimated on basis of UNICEF's experience. A series of new proposals have been received by UNICEF New York in response to a guideline shared through UNICEF country offices during 2001. A team of advisors had reviewed the draft proposals and advised on quality improvements. In addition to the 50 countries that have finance remaining of earlier funding rounds, 49 new proposals passed review and received funding during 2001-2002 totalling US\$31million. Sources of revenue included the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID, Kiwanis International, various UNICEF Committees and CDC. The present estimate for unmet external finance requirements includes a number of significant-sized countries, and UNICEF estimates on basis of previous experience a shortfall of approx. US\$17.6million.

- Salt producers meetings in Russian Federation and Uzbekistan

A national salt producers conference was held 16-17 October 2002 in Moscow, with sponsorship of UNICEF. Major Network contributors in the program included WHO, ESPA, Kiwanis International and ICCIDD. The 95 participants included salt producers and their trade networks, and representatives of government ministries, academia, NGO's, and the media. A salt situation assessment, conducted in preparation for the conference, has been posted on the Network website. The Russian salt industry now has no real obstacles in meeting the country's demand for iodized salt in full. The conference adopted a statement that USI should be promoted as the single most effective strategy for meeting the UNGASS goal by 2005 in the Russian Federation. As prelude to a National Coalition, a public council consisting of representatives of the salt industry, government agencies, and civil society organizations was organized to coordinate joint efforts towards sustainable IDD elimination. UNICEF committed to support the work of the council, to elevate the political imperative of timely goal achievement.

Uzbekistan held a national salt producers meeting in Tashkent on 24-25 October 2002 supported by UNICEF, ICCIDD and the Asian Development Bank. The 50plus participants included 18 salt manufacturers from around the country among a host of medical professionals and government officials. The Chairman of the Russian Salt Producers Association, Mr Boris Apanasenko shared the experiences from Russia. The Conference Declaration emphasizes the rights of all families on a diet sufficient in iodine, re-confirmed the national agreement on USI as the single strategy for IDD elimination, pressed for adoption of a harmonized iodization level at par with the other CIS countries and called on Government to forthwith enact appropriate legislation. Salt producers agreed to meet again in January 2003 to form a national salt producers association.

- Developments in Eastern Europe

Current funding provided (see above) includes the Russian Federation and Belarus, where a strategy is being developed with input from Johns Hopkins University for a comprehensive communication plan. Jack Ling has provided inputs through the UNICEF RO. The micronutrient survey in Ukraine, with CDC support, is close to completing its field data collection. UNICEF special ambassador Anatoly Karpov had met with President Kuchma and pressed for legislation by 2003. A MOST consultant, Dr. Robin Houston, in end 2002 has completed IDD program reviews in Bulgaria and Moldova. Bulgaria is preparing for a national survey to collect information on its elimination status. Macedonia is preparing for an assessment in early 2003 of the national progress, with Federated Republic of Yugoslavia considering.

- Follow-up from Ghent meeting on Iodine Nutrition in Europe

The IDD Newsletter of November 2002 includes a manuscript summarizing the most recent iodine status in West-Central Europe based on contributions made at a special side event, organized by ICCIDD at the European Thyroid Association meeting in Gothenburg, 7 September 2002. The manuscript expands on an initial overview discussed in Ghent and offers substantive evidence of the significant progress being made in this part of Europe. Nevertheless, the overview concludes that more than half of the population in W/C Europe still is iodine deficient. The authors comment on the special European context of strong insistence on consumer choice preference, the limitations on iodized salt use in food processing industries, and the weak commitments in governments to play an active role in national oversight.

- IRLI Lab Network Meeting, Cape Town

With strong CDC leadership, a harmonization workshop was held by the IRLI (International Resource Laboratories for Iodine) network on 10-14 November 2002 in Cape Town, hosted by the MRC Nutrition Programme in South Africa. The very successful workshop addressed a broad variety of needs and objectives, ranging from technical issues, to sponsorship questions, to developing functional iodine reference laboratories in each WHO region. The discussions strengthened the ongoing collaboration among the sponsoring organizations in initiating a network of 12 reputable laboratories, with CDC as a supportive node, which would provide quality assurance services to the laboratories in their respective regions or areas. Specific actions were recommended to promote the IRLI services, based on realistic analysis of the costs. CDC is producing a CD-Rom based report of the workshop. A website is available at http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/impact/global/irli_network.htm

7. Challenges

- Follow-up from UNGASS

UNICEF is leading a group including CDC and Emory in development of a programming guideline for sustainable IDD elimination. The guideline is meant to adjust to new realities and take advantage of the lessons learned during the previous decade. A key effort will be directed at including methods of forming national coalitions to lay a foundation for national ownership in sustaining the success. The guideline should be ready in draft by early Spring 2003.

The Board discussed the opportunity of inserting specific reference to iodine nutrition work in the UNGASS follow-up action plans that the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of all countries will submit to UNICEF in September 2003. It was argued that in specific countries Board member organizations should establish direct contact through their affiliates with the national focal points, as a means of assuring that achievement of the IDD elimination goal by 2005 was not being overlooked.

UNICEF promised to find out in priority countries the officers involved in action plan development, and share this information among Board members. Member organizations would then approach the national contact focal points with an offer of assistance.

- Focus on major countries

A review of the Global Score card (posted on the Network's website) indicates priority for efforts to expand universal salt iodization in the following countries: Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Pakistan, Ukraine and Russian Federation (see above, point 6).

Ethiopia. From published evidence, this is the most affected country in Africa. The large bulk of salt for Ethiopia is imported, previously from Eritrea. Since the war with Eritrea, however, all imports are now channelled through Djibouti. The previous law mandating iodization has been repealed and importers do not insist on it. A small-size iodization effort of domestically produced salt is being supported though UNICEF. A sound plan for tackling the thorny internal political issues is required, in combination with broader and high-level political pressure by supportive donors and agencies.

Indonesia. On invitation by World Bank, MI is involved in an evaluation of progress since the last independent evaluation in 1996. One issue demanding more attention is the drive for decentralized decision-making, which indicates a necessity for each district leader to be committed to USI. MI promised to keep the Board informed.

Philippines. The proposed Manila meeting of national parties to re-invigorate the national resolve and accelerate progress was postponed. UNICEF is sponsoring a series of studies of the national salt situation and the enforcement practices. The Board resolved to make additional inroads through a Human Rights Group and the press to encourage the government to take a more active interest in achieving USI. UNICEF promised to contact the Representative in Manila and offer support. A next call on Senator Flavier and on human rights activists and the press is indicated.

Pakistan. MI works with UNICEF to raise the interest in Government to support efforts by salt producers but the coordination with Ministry of Health is slow. The idea is to use a "Swat district" model and replicate its essential elements throughout the country. A national nutrition survey has just been completed and the results are awaited, but the use of iodized salt is not likely to be more than 20%. There are frequent reports of false labelling.

India. A UNICEF-sponsored study of salt iodization efforts, with major focus on Gujarat, has just been released. The UNICEF Health and Nutrition officer has promised to keep the Board informed.

Ukraine. Government has published a national plan of action to tackle iodine deficiency but specific action is unclear. The first results of the national nutrition status survey are expected by March 2003. There is a new UNICEF Representative and the priority in UNICEF to work on iodine nutrition is high. The ongoing CDC-sponsored efforts with Sister Cities and USAID may provide a basis for increased communication efforts. There is clear need for a market analysis to accurately discern the patterns of decision making in the provision of salt to populations. SI promised to seek for an expert. The national salt producer Ukrsol has become member of ESPA (www.eu-salt.com)

8. Evaluation

The Co-chair introduced the subject by saying that 2 years after the first Summit, time may have come to look closer at our work, performance and plans, including the question how and what Network members communicate in the regular channels about the plans and work of the Network. In the short time of the

Network's existence, meetings have been held in a number of locations, but the track record not only consists of meetings. It is as much important to follow-through on the commitments made at meetings and to have a mechanism in place to verify that commitments are met. Assessments have become a greater part of the efforts recently, and more efforts are ongoing to reach and work directly with the ultimate clients, national leaderships.

The Board discussed the need for more clarity on approaches and methods of stimulating the formation of National Coalitions. China and a few European countries offer good examples of successful national collaboration among sectors at high level. In Brazil, the salt producers are anxious to form a national coalition. A Subcommittee was formed to submit to the Board ideas on a guideline. Members of the Subcommittee are John Dunn (ICCIDD), Nettles Brown (Kiwanis) and Dick Hanneman (Salt Institute), with David Haxton (MI) as scribe. The Board asked for a draft note by end February 2003.

The Board expressed desire to have measurable milestones for the Network's accomplishments. The Secretariat was asked to produce a short report of achievements during the last 18 months.

On lessons from the collective experience to date, the following "Needs" statements were offered and accepted:

- (a) The need to improve on sharing among all members what Network members do, have, and plan
- (b) To advise all others in advance of actions that each member proposes, to prevent blind siding
- (c) A pro-active Secretariat for information, exchanges, etc. rather than await others to take a lead
- (d) Each member to address national challenges, identified for instance through the Score Card and other means of identifying national bottlenecks and opportunities
- (e) All Board members to inform their members of what we are and do, what they can do, and not do
- (f) To remember two simultaneous tasks: 1. Eliminate IDD, and 2. Sustain iodine nutrition. The first has a time limit, the second not
- (g) Absent national ownership, we will fail
- (h) To make the Net "Work" for us: Form coalitions now
- (i) "Assessment" does not take place only at the goal line, but is a continual need. While assessing, we too often avoid stressing political channels, agricultural channels, educational channels and other national systems

9. Expansion of the Network

Members discussed the option to expand the Network from a number of different perspectives. There was a felt need to reach out to constituencies additional to those who are presently members, including organizations involved in educational objectives, private productive sector organizations, the press and other media, mental health organizations, societal representative networks, regional networks of private and civic nature, etc. It was stressed that expansion of the vision to include other constituents would be desirable, however without changing the underlying nature of the Network's mandate and organization.

The Board decided to nominate a small Subcommittee to develop a discussion paper on the subject and submit this to Board members by end February 2003. Members are: Bob Baldwin (leader), Marc van Ameringen and Glen Maberly.

10. Next Board meeting

It was proposed to hold the next Board meeting in Ottawa, and MI was asked to host the meeting. The dates would be communicated through the Secretariat, and would likely be end April 2003.

The China Salt Producers Association offered to host a Board meeting in conjunction with the Beijing Summit, likely in early Fall of 2003.