

IODINE DEFICIENCY DISORDERS AND SALT IODIZATION (IDD/USI) IN AZERBAIJAN



**Progress Report
January 2006**

OUTLINE

Donor : USAID

Assisted Country : Azerbaijan

Assisted Program : YH003 Health and Nutrition

Purpose of Contribution : Iodine Deficiency Disorders and
Universal Salt Iodization (IDD/USI)

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1. Project objectives and activities

Goal

To raise the household consumption of iodized salt up to 95% level nationwide.

Objectives:

To increase awareness of the population on the importance of consuming only iodized salt.

To sensitize public, government and private enterprises towards production, retail, sale and import of iodized salt.

To support public awareness campaigns through NGOs, CBOs, schools and mass media.

Activities supported with the contribution

- The communication strategy on IDD/ IDA was developed, providing a strategic framework combining programme communication, aimed at promoting behaviour, change; social mobilization aimed at mobilizing networks and partnerships; and policy oriented advocacy, aimed at generating commitment of policy makers and influencers to the programme objectives.
- Press kits for use by the mass media on IDD and other micronutrient deficiencies were developed and printed. The planned media orientation workshop was postponed until early 2006 at the request of the Ministry of Health. (see Constraints, below)
- An assessment on the effectiveness of the salt iodization process was conducted, which found that most salt producers were not using correct iodization techniques. A workshop for Salt producers and Ministry of Health staff on the critical importance of USI/IDD elimination and on Quality control and Assurance was conducted by an international expert. The findings of the assessment have provided the basis for developing the communication strategy, and for informing the policy-oriented advocacy process.
- Social mobilisation with the salt producers focused on the issue of creating a national Association of Salt Producers Association which would support the producers in their efforts to comply with the the national la on iodized salt. This will continue during 2006.
- 5,000 rapid test kits were provided to the Ministry of Health, community volunteers, youth groups and the Independent Consumer Union to monitor iodized salt at the household and market levels. Additionally, 16 WYD checkers were distribute to SIP for strengthening the internal monitoring system.
- Youth organizations promoted use of iodized salt through distribution of, leaflets, plastic packets, test-kits to students, school children and youth meetings and to households with the label “ I use only Iodized salt” and held advocacy meeting for young people in 7 district.
- The Independent Consumers Union promoted the use of iodized salt through its network of local organizations in 30 districts of the country, using advocacy meetings with participation more than 900 members and distribution than 3,000 copies of posters and IEC materials to spread awareness.
- 13,000 items of posters and leaflets were developed and disseminated among public, wholesalers and retailers.

Constraints

Project activities were not implemented to the level planned, and several key activities, notably media training and field visits, and peer education of school children, were deferred until 2006. This was primarily due to the slow down in the Government caused by Parliamentary elections which were held in November 2005 which affected Government process for at least half of the year. The Ministry of Health was particularly affected, as the Minister of Health was dismissed along with a large number of Ministry staff, thus seriously affecting the Ministry's ability to operate during the last quarter of the year. Nevertheless, the new Minister has been briefed on the IDD elimination programme and is fully committed to achieving the goals, so accelerated progress in 2006 should be feasible.

Impact

Availability of Iodized Salt

Monitoring of the market conducted by the Independent Consumer Union country wide in July- December 2005 found that availability of iodized salt was high, with iodized salts accounting for 84%, and non iodized accounting for 16% of the market. However, monitoring has also shown that there are a number of fake products on the market, with non iodized salt wrongly labeled as iodized.

Quality of salt iodization

The assessment of salt production procedures and the capacity of salt producers to correctly iodize salt found that the process of iodization does not comply with the Government's standards. As a result, the iodized salt on the market is not of the optimum quality. The assessment also showed up deficiencies in the national monitoring system, and the lack of attention given by the Government to ensuring adherence to the national law on iodized salt.

Education, Information and Communication (EIC)

Monitoring and small scale studies by NGOs the Independent Consumers Union indicate that awareness among the population on the importance of consuming iodized salt is high, both in Baku and rural areas. However, a household food security survey conducted by WFP and representative of rural areas of the country indicated that actual use of iodized salt amongst these communities was approximately 66%, which is lower than previous estimates, which had been primarily based on urban communities.

Future Plans

The assessment of the salt iodization process conducted in 2005 by UNICEF with USAID funds has highlighted significant weaknesses on the part of salt producers, as well as the lack of action by the Government in enforcing the law on salt iodisation. These weaknesses must be addressed over the coming months is Azerbaijan is to keep on track for the achievement of USI. The USI/IDD elimination activities need to make some adjustments in order to strengthen the monitoring system, support the Government in its effort to enforce the national law and standards relating to iodisation of salt, and to mobilise the media in order to stimulate debate particularly among policy makers and influencers and to sustain demand for iodized salt by members of the public.

Media:

A national level workshop for mass media will be conducted in early 2006 using the press materials developed this year. Journalists will be facilitated to make field reports on IDD and the USI/IDD elimination programme, and to become an important part of the wider system monitoring the quality and availability of iodized salt.

Public Awareness and advocacy campaign

Junior chess champion, Teymur Rejebov, will spearhead a major campaign to push for the achievement of IDD elimination disorder, while the Minister of health will be much more visible and personally involved in promoting the programme.

Policy-oriented advocacy

Orientations for senior government figures and parliamentarians, designed to promote the effective enforcement of the national law on salt iodization will be conducted. Several important issues (such as licensing of salt production, quality assurance of iodized salt) are not yet covered by existing regulations, and these gaps should be filled.

Social mobilisation

Increase demand on iodized salt and reduce the presence of non-iodized salt in the market through Mass media, civic groups and organizations (women and consumer's NGO, schoolchildren and their families, peer education of school children.), which to be better involved in advocating for elimination of iodine deficiency and in monitoring of iodized salt on the community level (schools, households).

Strengthening the Monitoring Framework the IDD elimination programme.

Advocacy and technical assistance for the endorsement of the National IDD/USI Program and the Monitoring Framework on quality of iodized salt . The monitoring system for IDD/USI should strengthen three main levels: Internal monitoring systems by salt producers and importers/distributors; External monitoring systems by the government (Ministry of Health, Custom Authority and other agencies); Monitoring at the household level (through cross-sectional surveys and community based monitoring).

Mobilization and support to salt producers.

Promotion of Salt Producers Association which can play an important role in strengthening commitment to production of good quality iodized salt as well as improving the sustainability of the system of iodate procurement.

Project Financial Implementation

Activity	Amount Spent USD
Development of Micronutrient Deficiency Communication strategy and press kits on IDD/USI and IDA by International experts	12,126.03
Development of IEC (leaflets, posters)on IDD materials and consumption of iodized salt	7,400
Purchase and distribute test kit for determining content of salt Offshore procurement of test kits and WYD	9,535.35
Promotion of consumption of iodized salt through NGOs projects on advocacy of USI and consumption of iodized salt, social mobilization and increasing public awareness among public and with youth participation in 37 districts	16,904.23
Capacity building of local salt producers on upgrading iodization techniques an internal monitoring quality assurance	15,544.22
Project Support	34,500
Total:	96,009.83