

For immediate release

Ethiopian Officials Visit Senegal to Share Experiences in Iodizing Salt

Dakar, Senegal, APRIL 27th 2009 – An 8-person delegation from the salt-producing region of Afar, Ethiopia, led by its Vice President, HE Mr. Mohamed Tahiro Hamadu will visit Senegal for a week from April 29th. The Vice-president will meet Mr. Amadou Sy, the Governor of Kaolack, a large salt producing region in Senegal. The delegation will seek to learn from the Senegalese experience in how small and large-scale salt producers ensure the salt they harvest is adequately iodized so that children and families can be healthy and strong. This visit is part of an on-going series of Senegalo-Ethiopian exchanges initiated by HE Hassan Abdulkadir, the Ethiopian Ambassador to Senegal, in collaboration with the Micronutrient Initiative, which is supporting Ethiopia as it rebuilds its capacity for salt iodization.

“We welcome the Ethiopian delegation to Senegal and look forward to sharing information on how both countries can increase the amount of salt being iodized in each country,” said Banda Ndiaye, Director of the Micronutrient Initiative in Senegal, who recently participated in the official launch of Ethiopia’s new salt iodization program in Afar on 11 April 2009.

“A lack of iodine continues to have devastating effects in both countries, causing preventable brain damage. This is completely avoidable. A simple dose of iodine in our salt can mean the difference between mental impairment and healthy brain development.”

Working in collaboration with the Micronutrient Initiative and other partners such as the Japanese government, the World Bank and UNICEF, Ethiopia has begun the process of establishing a new Central Iodization Facility (CIF), a modern facility equipped to iodize all salt harvested in the salt producing Afar region. A major challenge is to convince local, small-scale salt producers of the benefits of taking their salt to the CIF to be iodized.

Reaching out to small, rural salt producers has proven one of the most significant challenges governments across the developing world have faced in achieving Universal Salt Iodization. Often these salt producers live in hard-to-reach rural communities and/or refuse to iodize their salt because of lack of awareness of the health benefits and concerns about additional time and costs. They are also the main providers of salt for these hard-to-reach communities who tend to be the most vulnerable to iodine deficiency disorders and other health conditions.

The delegation will explore with their Senegalese counterparts how to reach out to these small-scale salt producers. To date, the Micronutrient Initiative, working alongside Senegalese salt producers and government, has had significant success in this endeavor. In Senegal, the Micronutrient Initiative has worked with small-scale salt producers to establish “groupements d’intérêt économique” - cooperatives offering access to specialized but basic iodization machinery. Processors use these machines on-site, plus potassium iodate procured by the cooperative through a revolving loan fund, to iodize the salt they are harvesting. Since June 2007, the Micronutrient Initiative and other partners have worked with small-scale producers to iodize more than 120,000 MTs of iodized salt but a gap remains.

In Ethiopia, only 4.2 per cent of households have access to adequately iodized salt and less than 10 per cent of caregivers know about iodine deficiency disorders and how to prevent them through the use of iodized salt. With the new Central Iodization Facility and greater awareness typified by this knowledge sharing between Senegal and Ethiopia, regional and national leaders hope that they can make significant and rapid progress in lowering iodine deficiency rates and improving child development.

Iodine deficiency is the leading preventable cause of brain damage and it can significantly lower the IQ of whole populations. A lack of iodine can result in cretinism, deafness or speech defects. Serious deficiency in a pregnant woman can lead to miscarriage or still birth. Because salt is commonly consumed, even in impoverished areas, it is an ideal vehicle to carry iodine.

The Micronutrient Initiative works to improve rates of iodized salt with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

-30-

About Universal Salt Iodization and the Micronutrient Initiative

Today, 70 per cent of the world consumes iodized salt, but a gap remains. The last 30 per cent of the global population that does not consume iodized salt is made up of the poorest and most vulnerable. This is where the Micronutrient Initiative concentrates the majority of its efforts – working with small salt processors to find sustainable solutions to iodize the salt that is consumed by the hardest to reach.

The Micronutrient Initiative is an Ottawa-based, international not-for-profit organization, with a regional office in Dakar, Senegal and a country office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, dedicated to ensuring that the world's most vulnerable - especially women and children - get the vitamins and minerals they need to survive and thrive, through supplementation and food fortification programs. Its mission is to develop, implement and monitor innovative, cost effective and sustainable solutions for hidden hunger, in partnership with others. In 2007, the Micronutrient Initiative's contribution to Universal Salt Iodization (USI) reached more than 280 million people, protecting an estimated 4.7 million newborns from the risk of mental impairment. The organization also makes an additional contribution to USI through its support of the Iodine Network, which focuses on advocacy at all levels to tackle the remaining gap to achieve USI.

For more information please contact:

The Micronutrient Initiative

Fana Sylla

Regional Manager, Resource Development and Communications, Africa

Villa N 6 Cite Alima, Sipres 2 (face VDN) Dakar-Senegal

Phone: (221) 33 869 32 99

E-mail: fsylla@micronutrient.org

www.micronutrient.org