

## **MI Facilitates Workshop with UNICEF on Universal Salt Iodization (USI) Legislation in Afghanistan**

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The Micronutrient Initiative (MI) started the new year in Afghanistan by assisting the Government of Afghanistan on 1 and 2 January 2008 in holding an important stakeholder consultation on universal salt iodization (USI) legislation in the country.

In 2007, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) in Afghanistan, with support from its partners on the USI program, had made several efforts to improve the quality of iodized salt in the country. Despite the president's decree on the ban on production and importation of non iodized salt, the MoPH was unable to garner the required support from other ministries (particularly law enforcement agencies), to put an end to the trade in non-iodized salt in the country. In order to get stronger political and programmatic support from the various government ministries, there was a felt need for legislation to this effect. In this connection, the MoPH requested UNICEF to hire a consultant to develop a draft of the proposed legislation.

After concerted efforts of over 2 months, and in close consultation with key partners, the consultant developed a first draft. It was considered important at this stage to obtain inputs from government and non government institutions, including the private sector. At the request of the Nutrition Department of the MoPH, Dr. Mirwais Rahimzai, National Program Manager of the Micronutrient Initiative (MI) in Afghanistan, in close collaboration with the consultant from the UNICEF, facilitated a workshop to discuss the proposed legislation on January 1 and 2, 2008.

The General Director for primary health care in the MoPH inaugurated the workshop. This was followed by a presentation on the proposed legislation by the consultant. Some 20 participants including representatives from Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Mines, Ministry of Commerce, Afghan Investment Support Agency, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Information and Culture, salt sector, Standards Development Agency, Environment control agency, UNICEF and MI attended this 2 day workshop.

This workshop was a critical step in the process of developing legislation on USI for Afghanistan. Next steps include review by ministry of justice, presenting it to the parliament and after the parliament approval the president will sign it. It is expected that this whole process will take about 3 months.

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