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[National](#)

Drive against iodine deficiency disorder

Special Correspondent

A move to iodise salt extracted from Sambhar lake near Nawa town

Small and medium salt producers organised into SHGs under a pilot project

Ensuring iodisation at the right level would be the key component of the programme

JAIPUR: Self-help groups in Nawa town, which is situated near the historic Sambhar lake in Nagaur district of Rajasthan, are rendering a yeoman service to the cause of prevention of iodine deficiency disorder by joining the drive for iodisation of salt extracted from the lake.

Small and medium salt producers in the town have been organised into SHGs under a pilot project launched by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in association with the Micronutrient Initiatives, UNICEF and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

A study commissioned by the Communication for Development and Learning – a Bangalore-based voluntary organisation – here this past weekend emphasised the need to strengthen institutional capacity of SHGs by federating them into an apex cooperative to equip them to develop market linkages.

The study, conducted by UNICEF coordinator Kalyan Singh Kothari, pointed out that establishment of an apex body for SHGs in Nawa, often described as a “salt hub” of the desert State, would not only ensure a good quality of the salt produced but also improve the SHGs’ access to institutional credit and ensure sustainability to their enterprise.

Small salt producers around the Sambhar lake account for nearly 10 per cent of the salt production in the country. A total of 953 salt units are in operation in Nawa block, producing about 10 lakh metric tonnes of salt annually.

Mr. Kothari said though the WFP project would help produce good quality salt, ensuring iodisation at the right level would be the most important component of the programme.

Iodine – as one of the essential micronutrients – is required for normal body growth, mental development and physical well-being of human beings. The iodine requirement is stated to be 150 microgram per person per day that works out to be an amount less than a teaspoonful, over a lifespan of 70 years.

The Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants' Society involved in the project's implementation at the grassroots level, has selected 15 SHGs for upgrading their skills and equipment and provided crusher-cum-salt iodisation machines and potassium iodate to them.

Mr. Kothari said the training in the technical aspects of variation in depth and density of brine, solar evaporation in pans at various points at the edge of the lake and proper handling of residue left after evaporation would lead to capacity enhancement of SHGs.

The study quoted WFP Senior Nutritionist looking after the project Deepti Gulati as saying that Rajasthan had the potential to make universal salt iodisation a reality.

As part of the project, nutritional awareness campaigns have also been taken up in Nawa block by using folk media and holding community meetings. Mr. Kothari said this had created awareness about the importance of consuming iodised salt and generated a significant demand. The study was funded by German Agro Action and the European Union.

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