

For immediate release

## **The Ethiopian government and Micronutrient Initiative celebrate the Establishment of a Central Iodization Facility in the Afdera region**

*Regional leadership and Canadian funding will help give millions of children a brighter future*

**AFDERA, ETHIOPIA, APRIL 11, 2009** – The Micronutrient Initiative joined Afdera landowners, salt harvesters and traders, community leaders, regional government officials, national government officials and UNICEF today to launch an ambitious project – the establishment of a Central Iodization Facility (CIF) to iodize salt being produced in the region. Iodine is a micronutrient essential to the development of children’s brains.

Until now, a mere one per cent of all salt produced in Ethiopia was being iodized, leading to high levels of iodine deficiency disorders, the leading cause of preventable brain damage. The new CIF, located in Afdera, will be a modern streamlined facility equipped with machines and material handling facilities to ensure iodization of the salt harvested in the area. The iodized salt will then be distributed across the country. Currently only 4.2 % of households have access to adequately iodized salt and less than 10% of caregivers know about iodine deficiency disorders and how to prevent them through the use of iodized salt.

“Iodine deficiency can significantly lower the IQ of whole populations,” says Berhanu Hailegiorgis, Country Director for the Micronutrient Initiative, Ethiopia. “Severe iodine deficiency in Ethiopian women leads to 50,000 stillbirths annually and the country’s goitre rate has increased from 26% in 1980 to almost 40% today. By providing iodized salt to families across the country, we can eliminate iodine deficiency and give a brighter future to Ethiopia’s children.”

“This initiative fulfills many of Ethiopia’s obligations under several global commitments and international resolutions,” says Mohammed Tahiro, Vice President of Afar region. “With this new facility, achieving Universal Salt Iodization is possible within a short period of time. We can meet our country’s goal of eliminating iodine deficiency disorders.”

The core challenge to achieving Universal Salt Iodization in Ethiopia is to ensure that all salt is iodized at the point of production (or in close proximity) before it is dispatched to consuming centers in different parts of the country. The CIF helps meet this challenge. Regional salt processors, including more than 400 small salt producers, will now bring their harvested salt to the CIF, where they can process and package it more quickly and assure that it’s adequately iodized.

Using its experience in other countries, including Senegal, Ghana, India and Pakistan, the Micronutrient Initiative will help establish the CIF as an independent cost centre that will operate the facility and process the salt for a specified fee payable by the salt producer/trader who brings the salt to the facility. The fee charged will cover operating expenses and ensure the maintenance of equipment and the long-term purchasing capacity for potassium iodate. As a second phase, the CIF will offer upgrading facilities to improve the quality of the raw salt before it is iodized, thereby increasing its value and marketability. The Micronutrient Initiative has undertaken this project with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

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### **About Universal Salt Iodization and the Micronutrient Initiative**

Today, 70% of the world consumes iodized salt, but a gap remains. The last 30% 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 - in developing countries 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:

Berhanu Hailegiorgis

Director, Micronutrient Initiative Ethiopia

Nifas Silk –Lafto Sub City, Kebele 04, House No. 161/01

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Tel: +251-113-714919

Fax: +251-113-71 57 44

E-mail: [bhailegiorgis@micronutrient.org](mailto:bhailegiorgis@micronutrient.org)

[www.micronutrient.org](http://www.micronutrient.org)