

A conversation with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) on July 30, 2014

Participants

- Greg Garrett – Director, Large-Scale Food Fortification, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)
- Karen Ziffer – Director, US Office, GAIN
- Timothy Telleen-Lawton – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Mr. Garrett, who spoke on behalf of GAIN.

Summary

GiveWell spoke to Mr. Garrett and Ms. Ziffer about the status of GiveWell's evaluation of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and to request additional documents that GiveWell is interested in seeing as part of its evaluation. Mr. Garrett discussed GAIN's work with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) on the GAIN-UNICEF Universal Salt Iodization Partnership Project; including the Project's work plan revisions, case studies of impact, approach to quality improvements, and the challenges of attributing changes in iodization levels to GAIN.

GAIN-UNICEF Partnership Project work plans

The GAIN-UNICEF Universal Salt Iodization Partnership Project is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). A little more than halfway through the project, BMGF and GAIN agreed to revise the original work plans for increasing salt iodization in Partnership Project countries, taking into account the current contexts. It was stipulated that work plans be revised in consultation with government and private sector stakeholders from each country (by November 2012 for Asian countries and by February 2013 for African countries).

GAIN worked with UNICEF and the Micronutrient Initiative to convene meetings in each region, which brought together representatives from government and other agencies involved in universal salt iodization, as well as representatives from the salt production industry. In these meetings, stakeholders looked critically at the status and targets of their programs. Covering 90% of households is the general USI target, though in some places 90% coverage is unrealistic in the medium term (e.g. Russia, for political reasons; or Ghana, due to a small-scale, fragmented production market). In the meetings, revised targets and revised work plans were developed. BMGF accepted the revised work plans in March 2013; these plans are now the roadmaps for the GAIN-UNICEF Partnership Project. The Partnership Project is no longer reporting against the original work plans.

Case studies

GAIN has written case studies of some of its projects, for example in Ethiopia and India, two of GAIN's most important intervention countries. These case studies discuss many aspects of the projects, including:

Ethiopia

- Development of a Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) system
 - Documentation of the training GAIN has conducted on QA/QC, testing and analytics
- Documentation of work with the Ethiopian regulatory body
- 2012 overview of Potassium Iodate current and forecasted demand, recommendations for establishing a revolving fund along with an abstract presented at the Micronutrient Forum that discusses the intervention's effectiveness
- Equipment towards the establishment of a Quality assurance and control system

India

- Management information system case study
 - This system helps the Indian government track salt flows, iodization levels and test results; this along with ongoing QA/QC training and standards improved tracking drove increased compliance
 - Compliance rose from 71% to 76% across India
- Manual update on QA/QC work, using data from the Salt Department

GAIN does not have documented feedback on every outcome of each aspect of the work plans. Over the coming year, GAIN is reviewing specific outcomes of the project further towards dissemination in 2015.

Quality improvements

GAIN does not conduct factory-by-factory audits; there are too many factories, and changing practices in individual factories would not significantly alter the overall situation. Instead, GAIN focuses on trainings of industry and food control at the national level helping to establish institutional structures, roles and responsibilities in QA/QC.

GAIN promotes a total quality approach – checking processes and protocols, rather than testing all of the salt (which would be overly expensive). The Partnership Project works with salt producers to verify and improve their QA/QC processes, then salt producers implement QA/QC processes to monitor and improve their iodization practices. The total quality approach is based on the International Organization for Standardization (ISO); specifically ISO 9001, good manufacturing practice, and hazard analysis and critical control points.

Before the total quality approach was implemented, many salt producers had monitoring processes, but they were not optimal. Rigorous QA/QC is new for medium-scale, developing-world salt producers, and it may be difficult for them to conduct independently. However, it is designed to be more sustainable, efficient, and cheaper than prior processes. GAIN has seen successful adoption of improved QA/QC processes in India and Bangladesh, and in Ethiopia as well, though at a slower rate.

GAIN including its technical specialist Lorenzo Locatelli-Rossi to work with ICCIDD and technical specialist to create its QA/QC manual for salt iodization.

Attribution

BMGF and other funders of GAIN are mainly interested in the end results of the Partnership Project, rather than in causally attributing improvements in salt iodization, which would be difficult given the many parties involved. For example, in Ethiopia, salt iodization rates have increased to over 80% from ~20% two years ago when the program started. However, this increase cannot be fully attributed to GAIN, as the Ethiopian government and other organizations have been pushing iodization as well. The Partnership Project is formally a partnership between GAIN and UNICEF, though on any particular aspect, one agency may take the lead.

Lessons learned

The GAIN-UNICEF Partnership Project is winding down over the coming year, and there is currently an effort to document and disseminate lessons learned from the Project and prepare next steps requiring investments in 2016 and beyond. Studies and topics being written up include:

- Updated coverage figures for each country
- Regulatory monitoring and the Project's contribution
- Iodization in small-scale salt production (using case studies from Ghana, Senegal, etc)
- Iodized salt in processed foods (focusing on GAIN's work with industry and policy-makers)

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