

## **A conversation with Greg Garrett, February 3, 2015**

### **Participants**

- Greg Garrett – Director, Large-Scale Food Fortification, The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)
- Ben Rachbach – Research Analyst, GiveWell
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**Note:** These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Greg Garrett.

### **Summary**

GiveWell spoke with Mr. Garrett of GAIN as part of the process of reviewing GAIN as a potential top charity. Conversation topics included GAIN's funding prospects and its future plans for its universal salt iodization (USI) activities.

### **Iodine deficiency and universal salt iodization**

GAIN wants to build sustainable, national universal salt iodization (USI) programs that will not require long-term international engagement. GAIN has made a lot of progress and is close to reaching this goal, but is not there yet.

Salt iodization has a strong evidence base, and the USI program is one of GAIN's top priorities to find more funding to continue to close the gap and ensure better iodine nutrition. For these reasons, Mr. Garrett believes that it makes sense for GiveWell to continue working on evaluating GAIN's USI program specifically rather than looking into other aspects of GAIN's work. However, some other micronutrient programs also have strong evidence bases.

### **GAIN's USI program**

#### **Current Situation**

In 2008, GAIN received a \$20 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for its USI program as part of the Universal Salt Iodization Partnership Project. As part of the same project, UNICEF also received \$20 million to work on USI advocacy and demand creation. This grant ends in 2015.

- The grant is ending this year.
- GAIN has spent approximately 90% of the funds.
- GAIN is using most of the remaining funds) to complete national iodization surveys, assess household coverage, complete iodine special studies and disseminate this information in the countries where it works and globally.

GAIN is planning to wrap up implementation of Partnership Project activities within the next month and a half so it can solely focus on the surveys, studies and dissemination.

A small amount of other funding remains to be spent on implementation:

- Around \$300,000 remains for USI implementation in Ethiopia and \$150,000 for Pakistan. GAIN will use some of these funds to buy lab equipment for the Ethiopian food and drug administration to test salt and provide training for regulatory monitoring.
- USAID granted GAIN \$100,000 for work in Tajikistan over the last year. GAIN has already spent most of these funds. The grant may be replenished this year.
- GAIN is planning to use part of the grant it received from Good Ventures last year for its work with salt producers and regulatory agencies in Afghanistan.

Because future funding is uncertain, GAIN has started to let go of some of its USI staff members. GAIN would like to quickly obtain 'core' funding so it can bridge the gap and keep its critical USI infrastructure

## **Future Goals**

### *Possible scope of future programs*

Over the past few years, GAIN's USI program has spent on average \$2.5 million per year. This includes core operating costs as well as equipment expenditures (e.g. buying analytical devices for governments to test salt and buying potassium iodate for small scale salt iodization facilities). It has worked in 15 countries primarily.

Of these 15 countries, GAIN is looking to prioritize around 10 in the future. Countries such as Ghana and Senegal where it has found it hard to improve iodization using a market-based approach may not be included in these 10. In Senegal, for example, there are over 10,000 small salt farmers. It is expensive to monitor these individual farms to ensure salt iodization. In countries like this, USI may need to be complemented. For example, it may be more effective to ensure bouillon cubes which are widely consumed in these countries, are made with iodized salt. Bouillon cubes are widely used in Senegal, even in rural areas, and fortifying them with iodine could provide up to 30-40% of the recommended daily iodine intake. GAIN is also planning to stop working in countries that are now successfully sustaining their own USI programs, such as China.

GAIN would need a minimum of \$1.5 million dollars annually to continue its work in 10 countries. This assumes that UNICEF would continue to work on USI policy and advocacy and the Micronutrient Initiative would continue its own USI work in specific countries.

With further funding, GAIN would continue its work to build capacity of governmental food control bodies, which often lack the capacity to monitor the salt industry, titrate and test salt in the laboratory, and enforce fines levied against noncompliant producers. GAIN also provides quality assurance and quality control support directly to the salt industry to ensure that producers are adequately iodizing. M&E and building national systems for monitoring of iodine nutrition

would be a priority. GAIN does not plan to spend a significant amount of money on equipment or potassium iodate in the future.

#### *Advocacy possibilities*

If UNICEF did not receive further funding for its USI work, GAIN would have to play a bigger role in USI advocacy. GAIN could fund this work from its general advocacy budget. GAIN has received grants from other donors to do nutrition policy advocacy at the national level but not specific to iodine.

UNICEF is an important player in USI advocacy, but in some countries GAIN is arguably the main policy advocate for USI. In other countries, GAIN has strong relationships that would allow it to be an effective policy advocate. If GAIN needs to stop its USI support due to lack of funds, GAIN staff associated with other nutrition programs would continue to advocate for USI internationally. However, it will be more difficult to get USI and iodine nutrition on national agendas if GAIN loses funding for its USI activities.

#### *Future funding possibilities*

GAIN does not typically rely on individual donors. It is actively looking for more funding for USI, but it has not identified any possible major donors.

GAIN is finding opportunities to pitch USI to donors, such as USI as one part of a comprehensive approach to maternal and child nutrition.

It is unclear how much further funding the Gates Foundation will provide to GAIN's USI program.

#### *Relationship with UNICEF*

USAID has a congressional mandate to grant UNICEF a certain amount of funding for USI work annually. GAIN would like to take a discussion forward whereby it works closely with USAID and UNICEF on USI in complementary fashion building on current collaboration of the USI Partnership Grant.

GAIN and UNICEF did not regrant funds to each other in the past because the Gates Foundation gave both of them ample funding.

UNICEF has field offices in numerous countries. GAIN has 10 country field offices and in some of these offices has over 20 employees.

### **Iodine Global Network**

The Iodine Global Network (IGN) acts as a global watchdog for iodine nutrition and provides normative measures, such as the scientific definition of adequate iodine nutrition. It helps to bring other organizations, such as UNICEF and GAIN, together at the global level and provides some high-level advocacy tools. Mr. Garrett is on IGN's board.

IGN doesn't have full-time staff in country offices and has a limited role at the country level in terms of implementation. Therefore there is a strong and complementary role each organization (GAIN and IGN) can play in ensuring better iodine nutrition.

*All GiveWell conversations are available at <http://www.givewell.org/conversations>*