

Law on use of iodised salt hits snags

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ISLAMABAD - The long due "Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Bill 2009" prepared with consultation of all stakeholders hit snags, as the Cabinet Division did not agree to the justifications provided regarding the need and importance of the proposed legislation in the country.

Despite strong support from the Ministry of Health to get the law approved the Cabinet Division has objected that the Ministry has singled out only one health-related item" for legislation, while there are "many other health related issues like immunisation of children, water borne diseases etc where no formal legislation is available.

The Ministry of Health was suggested not to pursue the legislation anymore as this law would be discriminatory in nature.

Interestingly, NWFP and Balochistan already possess a legislation banning production, sale and utilisation of non-iodised salt while the federal area and the two big provinces still lack legislation for banning non-iodised salt.

The Nutrition Wing of MoH with technical and legal support from UNICEF developed a full-fledged regulatory mechanism in the form of legislation to ensure proper production and storage, sale, distribution of iodised salt in country.

The first draft legislation was submitted to Ministry of Law and Justice and Human Rights for vetting through DG Health in 2008.

Ministry for Health was advised to seek comments from Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock prior to proceeding fur-

ther and after review; the Ministry fully supported the legislation.

Iodine deficiency is the greatest but most preventable cause of mental retardation in the world. According to the WHO iodine deficiency currently affects billions of people around the world. It has left 150 million people brain damaged.

Iodine deficiency is reported as one of the largest contributor to the world load of micronutrient deficiency and stands as approximately two billion affectees.

Although goiter is the most recognisable sign of iodine deficiency, it is the less visible mental and physical defect that can devastate entire communities and children are the most vulnerable.

According to statistic approximately more than 50 percent population of the country is at risk of IDD's.

In recent years in Pakistan the use of iodised salt at the household level has increased from 17 to 50 percent, but still it is the lowest as compared to all the countries in the South Asian region.

To address the problem a National IDD Control Programme was also launched in 1994 but the progress towards universal salt iodisation remained less than required due to numerous reasons mainly because non existence of a law in this regard.

As legislation will legally bound to produce iodised salt. Neighbouring countries including India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Iran are far ahead from Pakistan in the field of iodised salt production and iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) control.