



# Lessons from the Field Salt Reduction in MONGOLIA



## JOINT ACTION PLAN

The 2010 WHO regional consultation set the stage for salt reduction in Mongolia. Priority actions included conducting baseline surveys, developing a national action plan, working with industry, establishing standards for school foods, and raising consumer awareness through focused messaging. A subsequent country consultation in 2011 convened Government, industry and manufacturers to plan salt reduction pilot initiatives. A joint action plan was agreed between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Light Industry (MOFALI) to develop a national salt reduction strategy.



## PINCH SALT INITIATIVE

The *Pinch Salt* pilot initiative targeted three factories to educate workers about salt reduction and reduce salt in canteen meals. After a two-year follow-up, 20% of participants recognized the health risks of a diet high in salt and reduced their daily salt intake by 2.8 grams. The success seen in this pilot helped inform a National Salt Reduction Strategy which was endorsed in 2015.



## REFORMULATION AND LABELLING

Site visits and consultations with bakeries drove reformulation efforts, further expanding to meat industries and mass catering services. The bread company Talkh Chikher reduced salt content of its leading product by 12% with other bakeries following, leading to a 1.6% average salt reduction in bread products.

Food labelling standards were updated to include salt content per 100g/mL, and voluntary front-of-pack labelling was implemented. The next step will include lowering the minimum salt content standard for processed meats.



## INCENTIVES FOR SALT REDUCTION

An innovative competition *Let's Promote Low Salt Food Production* launched in 2018, awarding businesses, schools and organizations that reduced salt in food products and catered meals. The first phase (2018) took place in Ulaanbaatar city and the second (2019-2020) has been organized at the national level. A kindergarten, workplace dining facility, and meat company were announced as the first winners, receiving awards and media attention for their efforts.



## DRIVING CHANGE IN SCHOOLS

School chefs and professionals were trained to reduce the salt content of meals in school canteens, with 15 schools participating in 2019. Local champions were seen as important drivers of change by motivating colleagues to follow their experience and join salt reduction efforts.

# SHAKE the Salt Habit

## Key Events

2010

- WHO regional consultation in Singapore establishes priority actions for salt reduction.

2011

- Survey using 24 hr urine analysis estimates mean salt intake to be 11.1g/day.

2012

- The pilot *Pinch Salt* initiative launched in bread and meat factories to reduce salt in catered meals and educate employees.
- Industry site visits held by the Ministry of Health and WHO to initiate reformulation.

2015

- National Salt Reduction Strategy 2015-2025 was enacted with the objective of a 30% reduction in population salt intake, to 7.8g/day, by 2025.

2016

2017

- The national standard for labelling of packaged foods was updated to include salt content on the nutrition panel.
- The guideline on front-of-pack labelling of packaged foods was established with voluntary implementation.
- Mean salt intake based on casual spot urine samples was estimated for different population groups: 8.2g/day for ages 15-49 years; 7.7g/day for school children.<sup>a</sup>

2018

- The *Let's Promote Low Salt Food Production* competition (2018-2020) was launched to encourage salt reduction across industry and settings.
- Mandatory guideline on diet treatment was established to ensure that hospital patient meals do not exceed 5 g of salt per day.

<sup>a</sup> Estimation of salt intake is not directly comparable with baseline measure in 2011 due to different methods for measuring urinary sodium excretion.

Mongolia adapted interventions from the **SHAKE** Technical Package, a how-to guide for salt reduction based on very cost-effective interventions ("best buys"). See next page for more information.

# Lessons learned from implementing SHAKE interventions in Mongolia

## Salt Reduction Activities

## Lessons Learned

## Stakeholder Insights

### SURVEILLANCE

- ✓ Baseline salt intake estimated at 11.1g/day
- ✓ Pre and post-intervention monitoring of Pinch Salt initiative

- Resources and training should be provided to small producers to assist with measurements of the salt content of products, particularly in rural areas.

*"Small producers don't know how to calculate salt content and they don't have much money to get their product analyzed."*  
Food producer

### HARNESS THE FOOD INDUSTRY TO REFORMULATE

- ✓ Reformulation initiatives launched in bakeries, meat industry and mass catering services
- ✓ Competition to promote salt reduction among food industry and in public settings

- Incentivising food industry with public recognition and awards can draw interest and commitment to reformulation.
- Imported foods should be regulated to ensure consistent reductions in salt across the food supply.
- Outdated food standards for minimum salt content in foods, particularly meats, should be revised to a lower, acceptable threshold to allow for reformulation.

*"Actually, the big bread company shared their experience how they can save money with less salt."*  
Government health organization

### ADOPT STANDARDS FOR LABELLING AND MARKETING

- ✓ National food labelling standards were updated to include salt content in the nutrition panel
- ✓ Voluntary guidelines were launched, including front-of-pack labelling with colour coding on fat, sugar and salt

- Manufacturers tend to "bulk buy" food labels which slows down implementation of new labelling standards.
- Food manufacturers require education and training on how to calculate the salt content in foods.
- Improving label literacy among the public will help consumers make informed dietary decisions.

*"When they make an order, they can use those packages at least for three, four years. They cannot put the new label on the old package."*  
Government health organization

### KNOWLEDGE - EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- ✓ Lectures on salt reduction provided to factory workers as part of Pinch Salt initiative

- A sustained, multi-year communications campaign targeting behaviour change should be scaled to a national level for population-wide impact.

*"We need more health literacy and a very good social marketing long-term activity."*  
Non-government affiliated health

### ENVIRONMENT - SUPPORTIVE SETTINGS FOR HEALTHY EATING

- ✓ Chefs were trained to reduce salt in meals served in workplaces and schools

- Identifying salt reduction "champions" helped influence others to take action on salt.

*"There is a need for capacity building of staff and more trainings."*  
Government health organization