Countering tobacco industry interference

The National Workshop on countering tobacco industry interference was organized by Ministry of Health, with the technical and financial support of WHO, Bloomberg Grant Initiative, and South-East Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA), from 25-26 February 2014 at the main conference hall of Ministry of Health, Nay Pyi Taw. The workshop was inaugurated by H.E Union Minister for Health, Prof Pe Thet Khin. The inaugural session was attended by H.E. Deputy Minister for Health, Dr Daw Thein Thein Htay, Directors-General, Deputy Directors-General, Directors and officials from Ministry of Health and representatives from tobacco-control related Ministries who are the members of National Tobacco Control Committee.

As per the workshop programme, presentations were made by various resource persons on global, regional and country perspectives of tobacco epidemic and tobacco control, the scope, objectives and tactics of tobacco industry interference in implementing tobacco control measures, along with examples. During the two-day workshop, responsible officials from Ministry Health, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Home, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Transport, Office of the Attorney General, Nay Pyi Taw Development Council, University of Public Health, Myanmar Red Cross Society and Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association actively discussed on effective implementation of activities for countering tobacco industry interference in Myanmar. Before closing the workshop, participants indicated immediate steps to be taken by respective agencies, which are doable as per the mandate and existing procedures of their agencies. It was agreed upon that the national tobacco control cell in the Ministry of Health will keep in touch with various departments and agencies to follow up on the progress of activities identified during the workshop.

The Visit of WHO Director General and Regional Director

The Director General of WHO, Dr Margaret Chan, and the Regional Director of WHO South-East Asia Region, Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh visited Myanmar from 17-21 March 2014. The purpose of the visit was to meet with high-level Government authorities and to discuss with development partners, donors and UN agencies operating in Myanmar. During their visit they paid courtesy calls to the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. U TheinSein and the Speaker of the Parliament (Pyithu Hluttaw), H.E. Thura U Shwe Mann, and exchanged views for further strengthening of WHO collaboration in Myanmar. The Director General and the Regional Director were accompanied by Dr Ian Smith, Executive Director, WHO/HQ and Dr Pem Namgyal, Executive Officer, RDO/SEARO. The Director General and delegation also met with the Union Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. U Wunna Maung Lwin, the Union Minister for Health, H.E. Prof. Pe Thet Khin, and the Chairperson of Pyithu Hluttaw Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. During their visit to the Ministry of Health, Nay Pyi Taw, the Director General and the Regional Director joined the launching ceremony of the Emergency Operation Centre (EOC), which was established by the Ministry of Health through technical and financial support of WHO.
National Workshop on Myanmar Epilepsy Initiative

The national Workshop on Myanmar Epilepsy Initiative was conducted at Panda hotel in Yangon from 6 - 7 January 2014. The Myanmar Epilepsy Initiative has been implemented in 2 pilot townships in Yangon Region with the technical and financial assistance from WHO HQ.

The objectives of the National workshop were:

- To finalize the training programme and manuals for health care professionals and health volunteers
- To discuss the status of implementation in two pilot townships in Yangon Region including dissemination of results of the situational analysis that was conducted
- To discuss strategies for scaling up activities in 3 additional townships
- To discuss future scaling up and long term sustainability of the Epilepsy Initiative in Myanmar

It was attended by Dr. Tarun Dua from WHO HQ, Professor C.T. Tan, Professor Ernest Somerville from International League Against Epilepsy, Professor Win Min Thit, Professor /Head of Neuro-Medical, Unit, Yangon General Hospital, Neurologists from Yangon General Hospital, North Okklapa General Hospital, Mandalay General Hospital, Nay-Pyi-Taw 1000 Bedded Hospital, Defense Service Medical Academy, Yangon, Children’s Hospital, Pediatricians, Psychiatrists and Physicians from Yangon, Nay-Pyi-Taw, Mandalay, Leiwai, Officials from the Department of Health, Department of Food and Drug Administration, representative from Myanmar Maternal and Child Association MMCWA, Township Medical officers and staff from Hlegu, Hmawbi, Thanlyin, Kawhmu and Leiwai.

The main recommendations that came out of the workshop were:

1. To improve the availability and accessibility of inexpensive and effective anti-epileptic drugs at an affordable price
2. To develop a community based financing mechanism integrated into the township health system for sustainability and continued availability of anti-epileptic drugs
3. To develop a model of epilepsy care based on the epilepsy initiative, for all health system levels and health care providers to scale up nationally
4. To support the use of national level treatment guidelines and training resources already developed as part of the initiative in order to scale up epilepsy care across the country
5. To explore and develop partnerships at township, national and international levels for scaling up epilepsy initiative
6. To integrate epilepsy IEC into the overall national health education programme
Regional Artemisinin Initiative (RAI)

In 2009-2010, Myanmar reported suspected artemisinin resistance that was likely to flow from the Thai-Cambodia multi-drug resistant foci. The country took immediate action by developing the Myanmar Artemisinin Resistance Containment (MARC) framework during 2010-2011, which was endorsed by Ministry of Health (MOH) and partners/donors in April 2011. The Three Diseases Fund (3DF) provided initial funding for rolling out the containment activities in 2011. The budget for rolling out implementation by WHO and the national partners (within Department of Health (DOH)/MOH) during the period October 2011 to December 2012 was 2.4 mil. USD. As a continuation of MARC project from 2011/2012, a new proposal was developed with the expansion of containment activities to Tier 1 and 2 areas under 3MDG Fund for 2013. Subsequently the 3MDG project was extended upto 31 March 2014 (no cost extension).

In mid-year 2013, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis & Malaria (GFATM) has called for Concept Note from 5 Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS) countries including Myanmar for Artemisinin Resistance Initiative. The GFATM has pledged 100 m USD for 3 years from 2014 to 2016 for all GMS countries. It is planned by GFATM that Myanmar will receive 40 m USD for 3 years from 2014. Following this, Myanmar participated in the development of the Regional Concept Note on RAI in consultation with broad stakeholders (The National Malaria Control Programme, 3MDGF, UNOPS, NGO, INGO, etc.) in which WHO took lead in developing the Concept Note. The Regional Steering Committee (RSC) which is equivalent to the Regional Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM) was established on the 9th August 2013. RSC endorsed the content of the Concept note from Myanmar. The Concept Note of Myanmar was approved in November 2013 by GFATM.

UNOPS Myanmar was appointed as the Regional Principal Recipient by the RSC and several Sub recipients were selected including WHO. In this regard, GFATM, UNOPS Myanmar and the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) have proposed that WHO should provide technical assistance towards implementation of RAI project in the capacity of sub-recipient (SR). The Memorandum of Understanding between UNOPS and WHO has been prepared and it is planned to sign, following SEARO clearance, during second week of March 2014. The following main activities were proposed under RAI to be implemented by NMCP and other selected SRs in Tier 1 and 2 areas (in 52 townships) for the period of 2014 to 2016.

1. Special activities to contain drug resistant P. falciparum (Pf) malaria among mobile and migrant population
2. Distribution of Long Lasting Insecticide Treated Net (LLIN) to cover 100% in stratum 1 areas
3. Investigate all Pf malaria cases in low endemic areas
4. Comprehensive response package to all Pf malaria cases investigated
5. Administration of modified direct observed therapy for the treatment of Pf patients
6. Implement measures to quality assurance and quality control of Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs), antimalarial drugs, microscopy
7. Scale up availability of quality assured Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) and RDT in the private sector (including banning of ACT monotherapy)

(Activities Nos 3, 4, and 5 are new to Myanmar and therefore, it is planned to conduct a pilot study before it is fully implemented)

Tier maps of the Greater Mekong subregion (January 2014)
National Planning Meeting for Prevention of Birth Defects

It is estimated that every year about 6% of total births, worldwide, have serious birth defects due to genetic, partially genetic or environmental causes. To respond to this, WHO included the issue of birth defects in Executive Board (EB) and World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions in 2010.

Following this, SEARO has initiated activities to support development of national programmes for prevention and control of birth defects in Member States. Regional Experts Group Meeting on birth defects was held in December 2011 and Regional Programme Managers’ Meeting was held in March 2012. In consultation with Member States, SEARO has developed a Strategic Framework for prevention and control of birth defects to provide guidance to countries in evolving national programmes and strategies for prevention of birth defects to reduce morbidity and mortality among newborns and children.

Myanmar has participated in the above Regional Meetings. Following this, a national planning meeting was conducted in Nay Pyi Taw on 18 – 19th February in order to:

- Advocate among relevant stakeholders for considering prevention of birth defects as a public health priority.
- Review the current situation on birth defects in the country and status of implementation of the national Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH), nutrition and other programmes that offer opportunities for integrating/strengthening the preventive interventions for selected birth defects.
- Review the draft national plan for prevention of birth defects and provide recommendations for priority activities for the next five years.

The Union Minister for Health, H.E Professor Pe Thet Khin, delivered the opening address. It was followed by remarks and presentations from the visiting international experts from SEARO and Center for Disease Control (CDC) Atlanta. The meeting was attended by National and provincial programme managers for newborn, maternal, child and adolescent health, nutrition, immunization, Health Information System (HIS), representatives from academia and centers of excellence in the related fields, representatives of professional bodies/associations and UN agencies.

During the meeting, the draft national plan was discussed through presentations, group work sessions and plenary discussions. The next step is now to take the recommendations from the meeting and finalize the plan. This will be done in conjunction between the Ministry of Health, WHO SEARO and country office, and all other involved partners. It was also decided that the National Birth Defect Surveillance system will be introduced to the Neonatal Perinatal Database Network that are so far established in four tertiary Obstetric and Pediatric hospitals. This will then eventually be linked to the South East Asia Regional Neonatal Perinatal Database Network.

**Important dates**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 April 2014</td>
<td>World Health Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 - 30 April 2014</td>
<td>World Immunization Week</td>
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<td>25 April 2014</td>
<td>World Malaria Day</td>
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<td>31 May 2014</td>
<td>World No Tobacco Day</td>
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<td>14 June 2014</td>
<td>World Blood Donor Day</td>
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