

Country Programme Evaluation - Myanmar

Evaluation brief - February 2021

Context

Country Programme evaluations were included in the Organization-wide evaluation workplan for 2020-2021, approved by the Executive Board in January 2020. They encompass the entirety of WHO activities during a specific period and aim to provide findings, recommendations and lessons that can be used in the design of new strategies and programmes in-country.

Objective and scope of the evaluation

The main purpose of this evaluation was to identify achievements, challenges and gaps and document best practices and innovations of WHO in Myanmar on the basis of its achievements over the period 2014-2018. These included not only results achieved by the WHO Country Office (WCO) but also contributions at regional and global levels to the country programme of work.

Key findings and conclusions

Question 1: Were the strategic choices made in the Country Cooperation Strategies (CCS) (and other relevant strategic instruments) the right ones to address Myanmar's health needs and coherent with government and partners' priorities?

The CCS 2014-2018 strategic priorities were relevant at the time of its development, addressed Myanmar's major health needs and were consistent with government and partners' priorities, WHO's Twelfth General Programme of Work and Regional priorities. Several factors affected its relevance over time, including: Myanmar's rapid economic development; emerging health issues; socio-demographic and epidemiological transition; evolving strategies and priorities at national level and within WHO; and the shift from MDGs to SDGs. The WCO accommodated such changes in its biennial workplans.

Areas of particular relevance and growing importance for Myanmar that are not considered to be adequately addressed in the CCS include an articulation of the strategic role of WHO: at state and regional levels; in strengthening intersectoral collaboration and convening partners; and in advocating for a stronger engagement of the growing private sector in the delivery of health services.

Question 2: What is the contribution/added value of WHO toward addressing the country's health needs and priorities?

Under Strategic Priority 1 (strengthening the health system) WHO supported the development of the National Health Plan 2017-2021 and the elaboration of national strategies and plans on human resources for health, health financing, health information and medicines.

Under Strategic Priority 2 (enhancing the achievement of communicable disease control targets), with WHO support, Myanmar has made significant progress in reducing the burden of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in the country during the period under review and the immunization targets of 90% DPT3 coverage at national level and 80% at township level were both achieved in 2019.

Despite limited human and financial resources in the WCO for Strategic Priority 3 (controlling the growth of noncommunicable disease burden), WHO supported national and sub-national initiatives in relation to healthy diets, gender-based violence, rehabilitation and road safety, among others.

Under Strategic Priority 4 (promoting health throughout the life course), WHO supported the development of national strategies and plans and the Maternal Death Surveillance and Response system was launched nationwide in 2016-2017.

Under Strategic Priority 5 (strengthening capacity for emergency risk management and surveillance systems against various health threats), in addition to the development of national strategies and plans, WHO supported the Joint External Evaluation of the International Health Regulations (2005) in 2017 and the resultant development of a costed National Action Plan for Health Security 2018-2023. At the level of the Health Cluster, WHO's role as co-lead is widely appreciated.

Question 3: How did WHO achieve the results?

Key contributions of core functions. The relative contributions of the six core functions continuously evolved during the period under review due to the socio-demographic, epidemiological and economic transition in Myanmar and the predominant role that the country has been playing at the subregional, regional and global levels.

Partnerships. WHO is considered a reliable and trusted partner and its role as lead technical agency for health is well recognized among Government and

development partners. Stakeholders' expectations of WHO are nevertheless very high and WHO is increasingly requested: to lead on broad health issues following a cross-sectoral and Government-wide perspective; to coordinate partners; and to advocate for resource mobilization and support to ensure the adequate implementation of the country's health policies and strategies. There is a sense among civil society partners that WHO should advocate for greater participation and engagement of the civil society in the health sector in Myanmar.

Funding. Given the high demand for WHO support, there are concerns about the limited financial resources available to effectively support the implementation of WHO's work in-country and enable the Organization to maintain its leadership role, particularly in strategic areas such as strengthening health systems and addressing noncommunicable diseases.

Staffing. As Myanmar continues to build its own human capital, it looks to receive highly-skilled and politically astute support from WHO. However, due to delays in filling key positions, critical technical areas are understaffed. The WCO also relies extensively on administratively demanding Special Service Agreement contracts. Clarity is also required on the timing and arrangements for the move of staff from the Yangon Office to Naypyidaw.

Monitoring. The lack of a results framework in the CCS 2014-2018 limited WHO's capacity to demonstrate results and its contribution to health improvements at country level.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: To address the long-term health needs in Myanmar, the WCO should concentrate on areas in which WHO has a comparative advantage. In the development of the next CCS, 2019-2023, it is recommended that the WCO:

- i. ensure wide consultation and participation of senior management of the MoHS, as well as other relevant government sectors, UN agencies, development partners, donors, civil society organizations, the private sector and academia;
- ii. include a robust and evidence-based priority-setting process, clearly defining the critical areas in which Myanmar requires technical support from WHO;
- iii. define targets and indicators for the expected outcome and output levels, to better address WHO's contribution towards the achievement of (i) the health-related SDGs in Myanmar; and (ii) the triple billion goals of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work;
- iv. in consultation with the MoHS, articulate the strategic role of WHO at the State level, including in conflict-affected areas, to address the gaps that States are facing and complement the work being done by local authorities and other health partners.

Recommendation 2: To enhance WHO's leadership role in health, its relevance and effectiveness in Myanmar and its presence where and when high-level decisions are made, it is recommended that the WCO, with technical and financial support from the Regional Office for South-East Asia and headquarters:

- i. finalise the plan for the relocation of the WCO from Yangon to Naypyidaw;
- ii. communicate on a regular basis with senior officials of the MoHS on the process for the relocation of the WCO to the capital and the challenges being faced that may require Government support.

Recommendation 3: To ensure that the WCO has the adequate human and financial capacity to implement its workplans beyond the priorities and activities outlined in the CCS, it is recommended that the WHO Secretariat:

- i. support the WCO to review its human resource capacity;
- ii. review the current role and added value of the national professional officers operating at the WCO;
- iii. analyse current funding mechanisms and develop a resource mobilization strategy.

Recommendation 4: To better contribute towards improving the health status in Myanmar, the WCO should enhance its strategic partnerships at country level to include a broader range of partners and national stakeholders. It is recommended that:

- i. the WCO strengthen its advocacy and convening role to ensure greater intersectoral collaboration and a holistic governmental approach to addressing health challenges and stronger participation and engagement of the civil society and ethnic health organizations operating in conflict-affected areas where their presence and added value is well recognized;
- ii. WHO continue to assist the MoHS to strengthen the Government's role in coordinating different health partners and the private sector operating in the country to ensure complementarity of activities and greater rationalization of the limited resources;
- iii. the WCO continue to invest in sharing information on main activities performed by the Organization, provide information on new policy and strategic decisions on health-related matters as well as on the status of main SDG3 targets and indicators;
- iv. the Regional Office for South-East Asia enhance its efforts in bringing countries in the subregion together to for cross-border activities and to facilitate exchange, capacity building and regional cooperation through additional opportunities such as online platforms in which national counterparts can exchange lessons and best practices.

Recommendation 5: The WHO Secretariat (regional offices and the headquarters Country Strategy and Support Department) should work together to better define the role and responsibilities of Deputy WHO Representatives in countries where they are assigned.

Contacts

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Hyperlinks: [Evaluation report](#) and its [Annexes](#).