



## Note for the Record

**Forth Meeting of the UN Thematic Working Group on Noncommunicable Diseases,  
25 November 2021, Bangkok, Thailand**

### Introduction

The third meeting of the UN Thematic Working Group (UNTWG) on noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) was held on Thursday 25 November 2020 from 1.0 PM to 4.00 PM at the UN Conference Center, Bangkok. The meeting was co-chaired by Ms. Gita Sabharwal, UN Resident Co-Ordinator for Thailand and Taweessap Siraprapasiri, Senior Advisor of the Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health. The list of attendees is attached (Annex).

NCDs impact every aspect of development and take a huge toll on the economy. At least half of all premature NCD related deaths can be avoided. The co-chairs highlighted the need for multisectoral action to address NCDs emphasizing that most of the policies and actions to reduce risk factors including tobacco and alcohol use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet and air pollution for NCDs must be initiated, owned, and sustained by line ministries other than health ministry.

### Agenda 1: Launch of the Report and Results and recommendations of the NCD Investment Case in Thailand

#### Key observations/discussion points

- As agreed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> UNTWG meeting, this report was prepared jointly by Thai experts, international experts, UNDP and WHO with assistance from the UNIATF secretariat. The report describes the economic burden of NCDs, the cost of implementing sets of evidence-based interventions and the return of investment of implementing those interventions. (Document is available at: [shorturl.at/sBEGM](http://shorturl.at/sBEGM))
- The report highlights that the total annual loss from NCDs is staggering—1.6 trillion THB or 9.7% of Thailand's GDP in 2019.
- The healthcare costs account for 9% and is just the tip of the iceberg. The vast majority of the economic burden is from loss of productivity which accounts for 91% of all NCDs related cost.
- An investment of THB 211 billion over next 15 years in implementation of proven package of interventions will save 310,000 lives and generate THB 430 billion in benefits for the national economy.
- Investing in NCDs will have direct and indirect impacts on achievement of all SDGs.
- The report provided a list of recommended interventions and actions to address NCDs in Thailand and emphasized that shared responsibilities from all sectors beyond health are crucial to drive the priority actions.
- While communicating the benefits to policy makers, it should be highlighted that over and above productivity related economic benefits, there are also additional returns/revenues in the form of taxes collected especially for tobacco and alcohol.

#### Action points:

- The findings of the report should be disseminated systematically to policy makers and public.

- The implementation of the recommendations of the report should be systematically monitored .

## **Agenda 2. UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund on NCDs and Mental Health—an opportunity for global leadership and advance NCD agenda in Thailand**

### **Key observations/discussion points**

- UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) is UN-wide and multi-partner initiative to support countries in tackling NCDs. It also aims to catalyze whole-of-government and whole-of-society policy change and programme actions as well as increase domestic resource mobilization.
- Thailand joined MPTF as a founding strategic partner where it would be an opportunity for Thailand to show global leadership, mobilize funds and share domestic expertise to other countries. At the same time, MPTF could be opportunity to build the capacity and affirm high level commitments as well as promote whole-of-government and whole-of-society including UN agencies to address NCDs in Thailand.
- Thailand can share experience on innovative financing to mobilize domestic resource to address NCDs, the case of establishment and implementation of Thai Health Promotion Foundation and funds.

### **Action points:**

- None.

## **Agenda 3. Physical activity break**

- Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) led the session of physical activity break by using the 3.50 minutes video on the rhythm of Thai produced by ThaiHealth.

## **Agenda 4. Interventions on the implementation of UNIATF recommendations, highlighting actions by UN agencies to support progress on NCD agenda in Thailand**

### **Key observations/discussion points**

- Advocacy documents were prepared by UNDP and WHO to drive NCDs agenda such as letter from UNRC to the prime minister on supporting the ban e-cigarette, joint op-ed on tobacco and COVID-19 and policy brief for seven ministries on multi-sectoral actions on NCDs.
- UNDP support the localization of SDGs at provincial level by including the strengthening of provincial tobacco and alcohol control efforts in the package of interventions.
- UNICEF and WHO supported the MOPH to develop the draft legislation to control marketing of foods and beverages to children and generate evidence for effective front-of-pack food labelling to address an increasing trend of obesity among Thai children.
- UNICEF worked with key partners to strengthen system to deliver effective mental health and psychosocial support services to children and adolescent in Thailand.
- FAO worked with MOAC to improve food system development and support safe and healthy diets through the development the toolkits in empowering street food, restaurant and home cook food for South-East Asian countries in systematic way.

- Thai NCD Alliance encouraged FAO to integrate more public health perspective through increasing access and affordability of safe fruits and vegetables. In addition, public-private partnership for health promotion should be addressed – particularly increasing health awareness in working-age population in public/private workplaces.
- ASH Thailand emphasized an important role of UN in engagement of non-health sectors to address health issues for example UNDP can catalyze tobacco and alcohol enforcement at provincial level through SDG monitoring, FAO was encouraged to support tobacco farmers in switching to alternative crops, UNICEF support in advocating the draft legislation to control marketing of foods and beverages to children is important and continued support of UNRC office to backup e-cigarette ban policy in Thailand is essential.
- Chair of CCS NCD emphasized that the investment case on NCDs in Thailand shows that major successes of NCDs investment are from non-health sectors as investing on health services give lowest return then we shall think about how to convey this message to non-health ministers to increase their accountability on NCDs. In addition, UN agencies may help in following settings; engagement with private sectors and linking domestic and international local governments to develop innovative ideas in addressing NCDs.
- Mahidol University mentioned that UN agencies play important role in catalyzing cross-cutting issues that mainly accountable by non-health sectors and sharing best practices in addressing those issues from other countries i.e., driving sodium reduction policy including monosodium glutamate (MSG).
- Department of Health (DOH) reported the progress of developing the new Thailand nutrient profile and drafting an act on the control of marketing on food and beverages to children with technical support from UNICEF, WHO, IHPP and key stakeholders.
- Department of Excise, Ministry of Finance stated that tax policy contributes to the change of consumer behaviors by reducing consumption of alcohol, tobacco, sugary drinks which are NCD risk factors. At the same time, health literacy is also play roles in providing correct understanding to Thai population in combating NCDs.
- Ministry of Commerce assured that they will work with MOPH and MOF on the continuation of the ban of e-cigarettes importation and enforcing this regulation strongly. UN agencies were encouraged to conduct the study of MSG usage and intake among Thai population and compare with other countries and provide recommended level of MSG consumption.

#### **Action points:**

- UNDP and partners (UN agencies and civil society) to communicate the findings of the investment case to the parliament and public financing champions to ensure that taxes are being raised and budget are allocated to various sectors.
- UN agencies and concerned partners to continue supporting DOH in moving the draft act on the control of marketing on food and beverages to children through the public hearing and legislative process in 2022.

### **Agenda 5. Key highlights of UN thematic Working Group so far and unfinished agenda**

#### **Key discussion points**

- UNTWG fits well in the NCDs multi-sectoral platform in Thailand as contributes to strategic objectives of WHO-RTG Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) 2022-2026 by bringing in UN

agencies and non-health ministries to drive NCDs including SDGs agendas especially development of public policy and legislation.

- There are unfinished UNIATF's recommendations that yet to be accomplished and those will be carried forward to implement in the next phase of CCS and UNTWG.
- Important lessons from UNTWG in Thailand were documented and published by the UNIATF secretariat. (Document is available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/united-nations-thematic-working-group-on-noncommunicable-disease-prevention-and-control-case-study-thailand>)
- The proposed way forward of UNTWG include a continuation of UNTWG on NCDs in Thailand with a revised TORs and expected outcomes, expanding membership to be more inclusive, rotating chairs and co-secretariat to increase engagement and accountability.

**Action points:**

- WHO, MOPH and Ministry of Foreign Affair to jointly prepare a concept note of UNTWG on NCDs in consultation with all partners.

## **Agenda 6. Overall comments, closing remarks and next steps**

**Key discussion points:**

- Thailand's UNTWG is a good exemplar of what a whole-of-government/society/UN NCD response looks like. Its operations in steering the platform and jointly advocating on specific NCDs policy and actions should be shared with the global community.
- The mechanism for driving actions is critical for the next phase of UNTWG especially in bringing together different skills and resource of different public and private partners around the table.
- NCDs which is long-term issue that being neglected during COVID-19 pandemic, but their impacts are enormous as evidenced from the investment case report. This stress an important of figures and evidence to prioritize actions. The kind of multisectoral actions and high-level co-ordination needed for NCDs is same as what was successfully done by Thailand for COVID response.
- NCDs is not just health but also development issue therefore everyone (public, private, society and community) has a shared responsibility in addressing them.
- Suggested actions to scale up case investment report include communicate the findings to the right audience; monitor the implementation of recommendations and mainstream the issues and engage concerned minister sectors.

**Action points:**

- UN to explore the possibility to organize a symbolic event such as an annual UN NCD Run.
- UN system to continue working closely with government, civil society and private sector to reduce the burden on NCDs in Thailand

## Annex: The list of attendees

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