



Photo Credit, UNMIT, Timor Leste



Photo Credit, UNMIT, Timor Leste

WCO-TLS/ PR 022/10/13

**National Strategy for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases, Injuries, Disabilities and Care of the Elderly & NCD National Action Plan 2014-2018**

A “National Strategy for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs), Injuries, Disabilities and Care of the Elderly & NCD National Action Plan 2014-2018” has been developed with support from the "EU-WHO Universal Health Coverage Partnership: Supporting policy dialogue on national health policies, strategies and plans and universal health coverage." The overall objective of the National Strategy for Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs), Injuries, Disabilities and Care of the Elderly & NCD National Action Plan 2014-2018 is to reduce avoidable mortality, morbidity, risk factors, and costs associated with NCDs; thereby promoting well-being, improving productivity and raising development prospects in the country.

This strategy aims to facilitate a comprehensive multi-sectoral response for addressing NCDs. The core values of the Strategy are “Equity, Community empowerment, Right to best possible health care and respect for cultural diversity”. The strategy identifies four broad Strategic Areas: i) Advocacy and Leadership for a multi-sectoral response; ii) Health promotion and Primary Prevention to reduce risk factors for NCD; iii) Health System Strengthening for early detection and management of NCDs and; iv) Surveillance, Monitoring and Evaluation and Research. In order to finalize the Strategy, Ministry of Health organized a two day consultation workshop with stakeholders between September 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> 2013. Dr Anand Krishnan WHO Consultant, Dr Rajesh Pandav, Health Policy Advisor and Mr. Leoneto Pinto, Programme Assistant were the facilitators from WHO, Timor-Leste.

During his opening address at the consultation workshop, the Director General of Health, Sr. Jose dos Reis Magno noted that ‘the rise of non-communicable diseases over the past decade is not just a public health problem, it is also a considerable obstacle for development. The prevalence of NCDs increases the costs of healthcare for everyone and affects governments, individuals, the private sector and family incomes.’ Premature deaths from NCDs cause losses to the economy and often results in families being impoverished. Sr. Magno stated that the Ministry of Health must collaborate with UN Agencies and partners to establish a multi-sectoral response to prevent and control NCDs in Timor-Leste.



Sr. Carlitos Freitas, Director of Public Health, Sr. Jose dos Reis Magno, DG of Health, Dr Jorge Mario Luna, WHO Representative to Timor-Leste and stakeholders at the opening of the national workshop

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are chronic conditions which are not transmitted from person to person. The four major groups of NCDs include cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases. A large proportion of NCDs are preventable by reducing behavioral risk factors such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and the harmful use of alcohol. In 2008, WHO estimated that two thirds of all deaths that occurred globally (36 million) were due to NCDs. In South East Asia, NCDs cause an estimated 7.9 million deaths each year. NCDs are expected to rise substantially in the coming decades as urbanization, globalization and ageing populations increase. Therefore, making changes in health policy alone will not be enough to address the burden of NCDs. A multi-sectoral approach by government and the private sector is needed to influence policies on trade, taxation, education, agriculture, urban development, food and pharmaceutical production in order to prevent and control the prevalence of NCDs. Multi-sectoral actions have been outlined for Government and development partners in the new national strategy.

Timor-Leste is currently facing a double burden of disease. Communicable diseases such as TB, Malaria and Dengue continue to pose a public health challenge. On the other hand, NCDs such as cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases have emerged among the top ten causes of death in the country. According to health authorities, hospital admissions and deaths due to NCDs are increasing among the young. The limited data available on NCD risk factors in Timor-Leste indicates that high tobacco consumption is one of the major risk factors contributing to NCDs. There is no information currently available on diet, physical activity, blood pressure and cholesterol levels among the Timorese population.

However, as part of the National Strategy for Prevention and Control of NCDs, WHO will provide technical support to conduct a national NCD risk factor survey to generate data for many of the risk factors that contribute to NCDs in 2014. During his address at the stakeholder workshop, Dr. Jorge Mario Luna, WHO Representative stated that the Ministry of Health will have the full support of not only the World Health Organization but the entire UN system to realize this national action plan. NCDs will be integrated into programmes across several UN agencies in Timor-Leste under the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) which will be finalized by the end of 2013.

Dr. Luna stressed that ‘multi-sectoral actions are imperative for addressing non communicable diseases, including effective partnerships with government ministries, media, civil society and the private sector.’ The strategy was officially approved following a presentation by the Dr. Ines Theodora, Director of Services for Disease Control, Ministry of Health to the Council of Directors on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Implementation of the national strategy will commence in January 2014.



**Dr Herculano Seixas, Head of NCD Department, Dr Anand Krisnan, WHO Consultant, Sra. Norberta Belo, Senior Advisor, MoH and Dr Rajesh Pandav, WHO Health Policy Advisor give closing remarks at the consultation workshop**