

Development of Thailand's Global Health Strategies

1. Definition

1.1 Global Health is concerned with the health of populations, especially those with health problems or determinants that transcend national borders beyond the capacity of any one country to tackle successfully and that require global or regional mechanisms and participation of all sectors concerned to manage such problems and determinants.

1.2 The Global Health System refers to the system and mechanisms designed to respond to cross-border health problems, requiring participation from all sectors, including the public, private and civil society sectors, and international cooperation in the management of the system.

2. Rationale

2.1 Global situation and movement

The globalization era sees more cross-border travel, contact and connectivity, bringing with it a great variety of health threats to the population such as the following:

- Communicable diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS, as well as the widespread of emerging infectious diseases, for instance, Ebola virus disease and new strains of influenza.

- Antimicrobial resistance, making microbes resistant to the effect of antimicrobial agents that were once effective and spread out even further.

- Natural disasters and environmental problems, such as air pollution caused by cross-border haze with an adverse impact on the health of the population in a number of nearby countries, flooding, chemical contamination in water sources, and oil spills in the sea, affecting the ecological system and destroying natural resources and marine food sources.

- Non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, cancer, cirrhosis, and emphysema, that see a larger number of patients, as a result of harmful behaviors and the consumption of unhealthy goods, including tobacco, alcohol, drugs, food with high sugar/fat.

2.2 Health problems: cross-border problems

Globalization has rapidly changed the nature of public health problems over the past three decades, as seen in the epidemic of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, zoonosis, antibiotic resistance, and free movement of harmful goods to health across border. These problems are threats to human security and cannot be handled by any one country alone. It requires cooperation of health mechanisms, at local, national, regional and global levels, involving a large number of international organizations in the resolution and management of the situation in a systematic and effective manner. At the national level, such management involves cooperation from all sectors, public health and non-health sectors, the private sector and civil society.

2.3 Additional health-threatening factors

These problems have become more serious as a result of a number of factors. For instance, there is greater international connectivity whereby people travel to visit each other more frequently and borders are more open leading to greater proximity as is the case with the ASEAN Community. Other factors are the expansion of international trade, especially goods harmful to health, unsafe, or detrimental to the environment,

and climate change. Without good accommodating measures, all countries, Thailand included, will be considerably adversely affected both directly and indirectly.

2.4 Many players in the global health arena

In this arena, besides the States, there are a large number of organizations engaged in cross-border health-related activities, such as the World Bank, Global Fund, World Trade Organization, various UN specialized agencies, international charity organizations, international non-governmental organizations, transnational corporations, and various business groups. Their operations have an impact on health work undertaken by the State or between the States who can no longer disregard them. These organizations have become major players in global health.

2.5 Work on global health by Thailand

Over the years Thailand has developed its management and cooperation systems within the country to do away with threats to wellbeing in a more satisfactory manner. Some examples are the development of the universal health coverage system and prevention and control of the spread of HIV/AIDS, especially access to cheap drugs. It has undertaken international cooperation in the development of health in neighboring countries to help stop the spread of diseases into the country. At the same time, it has played a part in setting and advocating health agendas at the global level, bearing in mind its interests and health-solution approaches and those of other developing countries, e.g. anti-influenza vaccine development. Furthermore, Thailand has provided health assistance to countries hit by natural disasters, e.g. when a typhoon struck Myanmar and when Haiti was hit by an earthquake. Such is its constructive role in public health in the global arena.

The above activities by Thailand are all designed to prepare its systems for all possible health threats and other changes in the future. In short, it aims to create security in the health system to provide safety and good health for the Thai population, thus contributing to the nation's economic and social growth. With a good system in place, Thailand will benefit from and can contribute more to the international community.

2.6 Global agenda: good health as basis for development

There is a ready awareness how the development of the health system can contribute to greater economic development. Consequently, health has featured in the UN Development Agenda. It started with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 with a number of health goals with a view that good health of the population can contribute to the country's economic and social development. As the MDGs will come to the end in 2015, new goals have been generated for sustainable development in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The new agenda will be an important framework for countries the world over to set their national development strategies and plans. It includes health as one the 17 goals, covering such issues as promotion of universal health coverage, eradication of communicable diseases of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, reduced mortality rate of non-communicable diseases, and promotion of mother and child health.

2.7 Trends of Global Health Strategy Development

Developed countries, like Switzerland, UK, Norway and Japan have their global health strategies and frameworks in place to ensure health security for their people as well as providing assistance and support for health development in other countries through various mechanisms and measures both bilateral and multilateral. All this is also made as part of the attempts to promote foreign policy, health policy and national image.

Within the above context, Thailand needs to adopt a proactive approach through its global health strategies, spelling out its vision and stance on the issue, improving mechanisms designed to promote public health, and creating national health security. These moves will help boost the country's economic and social drive and support regional and global development, while enhancing its competitive edge in the international forum. Through such actions, Thailand will stand to benefit fully from being part of the ASEAN Community and develop immunity to adverse impacts from globalization.

3. Thailand's development of global health strategies for 2015-2020

The Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are well aware of the increasing significance of the international health issue both at domestic and international levels. The Minister of Public Health announced Thailand's policy to support global health mechanisms in September 2014 and issued a directive to have the country's global health development strategies for 2015-2020 developed and completed by the end of December 2015.

The Strategies aims to ensure the wellbeing of the general Thai public and health security and safety on the basis of which the country's economy and society can be developed in a sustainable manner. In this plan, the country will play an important role in international cooperation and constructive responsibility in global health at the international forum. The plan emphasizes 5 main areas:

- (1) Promoting health security
- (2) Strengthening the health system so that it is delivered in an efficient, fair and equitable manner
- (3) Promoting Thailand to take a leading and responsible role in the global community
- (4) Promoting the alignment of global health policies
- (5) Promoting global health capacity and coordination mechanisms.

The development of the strategies entails participation of various sectors in every process. It was drafted at the joint workshops between the Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and received feedback and recommendations from other government agencies on issues in their concerns. The work also includes consultation with representatives of the private sector, civil societies and academics.

4. Benefits that the Thai public and Thailand will receive from the Strategies

4.1 Wellbeing of the public and health security of the nation: Having the global health strategies means that attempts will be made in a concrete manner to put in place a system and tackle health problems in a number of dimensions, including prevention and handling of communicable diseases, food and water safety, environmental health, security of medical supplies, medicine and vaccines, and medical preparedness in the face of disasters. All this will equip Thailand with health security and instill confidence in the Thai public that they will enjoy a good happy and healthy life, as all health risks are properly managed with minimal adverse impacts.

4.2 A strong, fair and equitable health system: Universal health coverage is a major basis of the Thai public health system whose efficiency has been continuously developed in line with the current changing situation which sees more foreigners migrate to live and work in the country and in the border areas. Consideration will be taken of suitable management of resources to ensure that quality medical service is accessible to Thai and foreign nationals and to prevent a possible spread of diseases to the Thai population.

4.3 Integration and alignment of international trade negotiations and international cooperation in such a way that it can protect and promote the health of the people in the country: The strategies aim to develop and improve coordination mechanisms between the public sector and other sectors concerned to ensure the integrated approach to the implementation of policy that may have health impacts on the public. This can be done through an exchange of academic/technical information, formulation of guidelines for trade negotiations and diplomacy, networking, and search for supporting countries. The aims are to protect national interests, prevent possible threats, and create a balance between trade and investment for minimal adverse health impacts and for greatest possible health benefits to the people.

4.4 Thailand's ability to contribute to the setting of public health policy and constructive responsibility in the global forum on regular basis: The strategies aim to develop Thailand's public health capacity, assess and determine the areas at which the country excels and for which it is ready to exchange and cooperate internationally at bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral levels, with other countries and international organizations in a systematic manner. Such action will serve as a tool to foster greater relationship with neighboring countries and other countries in the region and elsewhere. It may involve training, study visits and assistance given to other countries, thus creating international credibility and acceptance and helping Thailand play a leader role in the global forum. The act of spelling out Thailand's expertise in the global health strategies may lead to other economic opportunities beneficial to the Thai public and to Thailand as a whole.

4.5 Efficient coordination between sectors concerned and clear working direction: This will lead to continuity of the activity, thus protecting and promoting the interest of the country and of the Thai public.

5. Issue to be submitted for consideration to the National Health Assembly

Requesting the Health Assembly to consider Document Health Assembly 7/
Draft Resolution 5 on Development of Thailand's Global Health Strategies.

References:

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- 3) Suwit Wibunphonprasoet, et al (2011). Kan Satharanasuk Thai 2551-2553 (Thai Public Health) (Chapter 15), Bureau of Policy and Strategy, Ministry of Public Health. pp 485-494.