

Regional Consultation on Food-Based Dietary Guidelines for countries in the Asia Region

New Delhi, India, 6-9 December 2010

A Report



Institute of Home Economics,
University of Delhi



**World Health
Organization**
Regional Office for South-East Asia

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1. Executive summary

The Regional Consultation on Food-based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) for Countries in the Asia Region was organized from 6-9 December 2010 in New Delhi, India. The consultation was organized by the Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi; the World Health Organization's Regional Office for South-East Asia (WHO-SEARO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO-RAP).

Participants from 16 Member States [Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam] of WHO-SEAR and FAO-RAP attended the consultation. In addition, six technical experts and representatives from WHO-SEARO, FAO-RAP and FAO-Rome also attended the consultation.

The consultation proposed to develop a set of appropriate dietary messages for different age groups which may be adapted to local conditions by the respective countries. It also aimed to identify a framework for optimal dissemination of these messages as well as identify the need for technical assistance required for formulating/strengthening the national FBDGs in the countries.

The consultation was divided into plenary sessions, country presentations and group work. During the plenary sessions, technical presentations focused on current food and nutrient requirements and emerging nutrition concerns in the countries of the Region such as non-communicable diseases and childhood obesity. The procedural aspects of developing food-based dietary guidelines including effective communication and media advocacy were also addressed by the experts. The technical presentations were followed by discussions with the active involvement of all participants.

A presentation on an overview of FBDGs in the South-East Asia Region helped to contextualize the objectives of the consultation. The process of developing FBDGS as well as opportunities and challenges for

FBDGs was highlighted. Issues of food safety were also discussed. Recent developments regarding the estimation of food and nutrient requirements were also presented by experts. Effective strategies for communication of health messages as well as media advocacy formed the basis for two of the technical presentations.

Country presentations by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Lao PDR, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam highlighted the nutritional concerns of these countries as well as the strategies being adopted by them to tackle these problems. The presentations also highlighted the present status of food-based dietary guidelines as well as the dietary messages. Some countries had well developed FBDGs for several years and were, in fact, in the process of revision. Others needed to develop FBDGs.

For **group work**, participants were tasked to identify core dietary messages for six population groups: infants and young children; school-age and adolescents; adults; women in child-bearing age, pregnancy and lactation; the elderly; and for the prevention of nutrition-related non-communicable diseases. In addition, participants were tasked to identify a framework for implementation including dissemination of these messages as well as to identify the technical assistance required for formulating/strengthening the national FBDGs in their respective countries. Each group then presented their work and suggestions by other members were incorporated.

The **conclusions and recommendations** were presented by Dr Kunal Bagchi, Regional Adviser, Nutrition and Food Safety, WHO-SEARO, Ms Shashi Sareen, Senior Food Safety and Nutrition Officer, FAO-RAP and Dr Seema Puri, Associate Professor, Department of Nutrition, Institute of Home Economics (IHE).

In countries of this Region, the double burden of malnutrition is very evident. Under-nutrition among children is common as can be seen in the high levels of stunting, underweight and wasting in these countries. Some under-nutrition among adults, especially women was also reported. Widespread micronutrient deficiencies are also seen. On the other hand, food habits are changing rapidly, the population is becoming more diverse and the increased access to global food supplies is expanding the number and variety of food products available in the marketplace. This increasing affluence has led to undesirable dietary alterations like excessive energy

intake, consuming diets rich in saturated fats, addiction to tobacco and alcohol as well as reduction in physical activity. This has led to the emergence of obesity and associated noncommunicable diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disorders. Hence, individuals require guidance and dietary advice to promote healthy eating practices.

Several participating Member States have already developed national food-based dietary guidelines: DPR Korea, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. Some of these countries were in the process of revising/updating their FBDGs. In other Member States [Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Maldives, Timor-Leste] national task forces/technical committees/working groups for the development of FBDGs had been established or some work has been initiated.

There was agreement that all Member States should work towards the development/strengthening of their national food-based dietary guidelines programmes. Modalities to develop the FBDGs were outlined. The first step would be the formation of a national level working group which would include experts in health, nutrition, communication, policy makers, and representatives from the food industry, agriculture and the media. This group would be responsible for the development of the FBDGs as well as planning for the effective dissemination of the messages. The importance of follow-up and evaluation of the effectiveness of these FBDGs was also emphasized. WHO and FAO could provide technical assistance to Member States in the formulation/improvement of the national FBDG programme. This assistance could be coordinated to ensure effective support and utilization of resources.

At the closing ceremony, Dr Quazi Monir Islam congratulated the participants on their efforts and assured them of continued WHO support in development of FBDGs in the Region. Ms Shashi Sareen also reiterated FAO's proactive role in the development of FBDGs. Dr Kumud Khanna thanked all those who contributed to make the consultation a success – the participants, temporary advisers, resource persons, WHO, FAO and IHE staff.

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