Resolution SEA/R60/R3 on Nutrition and Food Safety in the South-East Asia Region, at the Sixtieth Session of the Regional Committee urged Member States to continue sustained efforts to strengthen nutrition and food safety programmes and WHO to provide necessary support to these programmes, including the national nutrition and food safety policies and plans of action. This report provides information on the progress achieved in nutrition and food safety activities in the South-East Asia Region.

The High-Level Preparatory (HLP) Meeting held in the Regional Office in New Delhi, India, from 14 to 17 July 2014 reviewed the attached working paper and made the following recommendations:

**Actions by Member States**

1. Member States should establish appropriate food control systems that encompass the entire food chain, with a focus on the consumers.
2. Countries should respond to the threats posed to safe foods from foodborne diseases and biological and chemical contamination of the food chain.
3. Attention should be focused on improving food security and dietary diversification, along with improvements in hygiene and sanitation measures in young children, women in the childbearing age group and the elderly.
4. Synergies between emerging infectious diseases and national food safety programmes for promoting the International Health Regulations (2005) should be maintained.

**Actions by the WHO Regional Office**

1. Technical support should be provided to Member States to improve performance of the national Codex committees, and INFOSAN focal points and their involvement in international standard-setting events.
2. Technical support should be given to improve the capacity of Member States to respond to biological and chemical adulteration and contamination in the food chain.
3. Member States should be supported in introducing a multisectoral approach along with systematic application of effective interventions to improve the nutrition and food safety programmes in the Region.

The working paper and the HLP recommendations are submitted to the Sixty-seventh Session of the Regional Committee for its consideration.
Introduction

1. Resolution SEA/R60/R3 on Nutrition and Food Safety in the South-East Asia Region urged Member States to make sustained efforts to strengthen nutrition and food safety programmes, and the WHO Regional Office to provide necessary support to these programmes. This report provides information on progress achieved in implementing resolution SEA/R60/R3 in the WHO South-East Asia Region.

2. Most countries of the Region are food-secure with relative self-sufficiency in food production and availability. However, there are population pockets that encounter food insecurity, leading to food consumption below recommendations resulting in undernutrition among several population groups. Many foodborne diseases are also prevalent in the Region that pose a significant public health burden. In recent years, the close links between food safety and nutrition issues have been recognized, with the call for an integrated nutrition and food safety approach to several key issues of public health importance. National nutrition policies and plans of action, most of which are multisectoral, and action plans for food safety are in place in all countries. Some countries have opted for a specific food safety policy and others for a more integrated nutrition and food safety approach. The Regional Office has supported Member countries in the introduction of several nutrition and food safety interventions and approaches. There is persuasive evidence to show that undernourished children, particularly those who are stunted, are at a higher risk of becoming overweight or obese and suffering from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in later life. This co-existence of under- and over-nutrition has been described as the double-burden of malnutrition. Several foodborne diseases (of zoonotic and non-zoonotic origin) are widely prevalent in the Region and pose a significant public health burden and challenge. In recent years, the closeness between food safety issues and nutrition activities has been recognized.

Progress made

3. National nutrition policies and plans of action, mostly multisectoral in nature, are in place in all Member States, reflecting the increased attention to this issue. Several countries have formulated national food-based dietary guidelines for a broader food-based approach to address nutrition issues. Action plans for food safety exist in all countries, while several have opted for specific food safety policies or a more integrated nutrition and food safety approach. In some countries, several government agencies are involved in food safety programmes with limited coordination and cooperation.

4. Member States have achieved considerable – though not uniform – reduction in prevalence of undernutrition and associated morbidity and mortality in children. The prevalence of overweight/obesity is considerably low with an estimated 5% of under-five children overweight/obese, range varying from 0.8%–12.3%. An estimated 70% of the households in the Region consume iodized salt as the main intervention against iodine deficiency disorders. Anaemia is the most common nutritional deficiency in the Region. About 55% of preschool children, 45% of pregnant women and 40% of women of childbearing age are anaemic, though the range in each category varies. Low intake of iron and folic acid, parasitic infections and low bioavailability of iron from plant-based diets are causative factors.
5. Food legislation in several Member States has been updated and food standards and regulations revised to harmonize national legislation with Codex guidelines. The food control and inspection activities and routine post-marketing food monitoring and control now exist in most Member States, though the human resources aspect of food inspection remains limited. Several Member States have strengthened existing national databases on foodborne diseases surveillance. To strengthen the rapid alert system in food safety emergencies, a regional meeting of the Global Foodborne Diseases Network GFN/Asia FoodNet was organized in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2010 and another regional workshop is planned in 2014.

6. Initiatives to recognize street food facilities that comply with hygienic standards and “healthy market” programmes to promote hygienic sale of raw and processed foods are in place in several countries. All Member States are part of the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) and 10 countries are members of Codex Alimentarius.

Challenges

7. The goal of the Regional Food Safety Strategy (2013–2017) is to encourage Member States to initiate, develop and sustain multisectoral approaches to promote food safety among all population groups. The Regional Nutrition Strategy: addressing malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies aims to assist Member States to develop a multisectoral approach and measures to promote nutrition among all populations following a life-course approach, while prioritizing nutrition actions in all relevant sectors. Resolution SEA/RC64/R4 on Regional Nutrition Strategy () was adopted at the Sixty-fourth session of the Regional Committee in 2011. Technical support continues to be provided to national micronutrients prevention and control programmes; programme for effective management of children suffering from malnutrition; strengthening the national INFOSAN, national Codex Committees and national food control systems.

Way forward

8. A nutrition orientation to national food production policies will ensure sustainable food production while meeting nutritional requirements. Access to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food is threatened by foodborne disease and food contamination – two growing public health concerns that need effective food control systems. The International Health Regulations (2005) require synergies to be maintained between the emerging infectious diseases and national food safety programmes. There is urgent need to establish effective surveillance mechanisms. A multisectoral approach involving all relevant sectors along with systematic application of nutrition and food safety interventions is required to improve nutrition and food safety programmes in the Region.