

## 4. Managing a foodborne disease outbreak in Cambodia

The Western Pacific Region continues to experience outbreaks of foodborne diseases. Food safety is a multisectoral challenge, and the prevention of and response to food safety incidents and emergencies require collaboration and coordination across sectors.

Cambodia has taken important steps to improve multisectoral coordination. In 2015, the Government launched intersectoral standard operating procedures (SOPs) for foodborne disease investigation. The SOPs serve as a common reference tool for foodborne disease outbreak investigation and response. They identify stakeholders and define their roles and responsibilities within the context of a foodborne disease outbreak. The SOPs also describe the communication lines within and between ministries and authorities.

The SOPs cover all aspects of foodborne disease outbreaks, risk assessments, and investigation and response relating to foodborne hazards. These include disease-causing agents that have the potential to cause foodborne diseases such as salmonella or methanol poisoning.

In August and September 2015, training sessions were conducted on the SOPs. The benefits were immediate: the SOPs were used to guide an investigation two months later and respond to clusters of suspected methanol poisoning linked with the consumption of locally produced alcohol in Cambodia. The response involved various departments and directorates under the

ministries of health, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and commerce, as well as the governors of affected provinces. The actions conducted included an investigation to confirm the disease-causing agent, laboratory testing, the inspection of food premises, product recall and risk communication. The SOPs helped facilitate a prompt and effective response by avoiding overlaps and gaps in actions of various stakeholders.

Prevention, preparedness, response and recovery from foodborne disease outbreaks are key priorities for WHO. The Organization will continue to support Member States to develop food safety guidance and to use lessons learnt to facilitate multisectoral action to prevent, prepare for and respond to foodborne disease outbreaks. ■



An outbreak investigation team interviews the owner of a local wine shop in Snoul district, Kratie province, Cambodia, December 2015.