

2. Convening to overcome commercial determinants of health



WHO calls on Member States to act together across sectors to support healthy diets and counteract efforts to promote products and choices that are detrimental to health.

Trade liberalization, globalization, rapid economic growth and urbanization have transformed the nutrition landscape. Populations in the Western Pacific Region are currently facing a double burden of malnutrition.

In a highly immersive modern communication environment, food marketers have almost unlimited access to consumers, and traditional diets are increasingly being replaced by convenient and attractive pre-packaged foods of poor nutritional value. Marketing of breast-milk substitutes negatively affects mothers' intentions to breastfeed, raising the

risk of all forms of malnutrition. There are 7.5 million chronically undernourished children aged under 5 years and 187 000 die annually. The stunting rate is 6.8%. Meanwhile, one in three adults is now overweight and 6.2 million children under 5 are overweight or obese. Diabetes has surged in the Region from 29 million (4.4%) cases in 1980 to 131 million (8.4%) in 2014.

These alarming trends, the endorsement of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition with six global nutrition and two nutrition-related noncommunicable disease (NCD) targets to be

met by 2025, and recommendations of the WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity are galvanizing countries to support healthy diets and address the commercial determinants of health – “strategies and approaches used by the private sector to promote products and choices that are detrimental to health”.

Many governments are implementing fiscal measures such as taxing sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) and imposing taxes on unhealthy foods as part of a comprehensive approach to reduce risk factors for obesity and diabetes. Representatives of health and finance ministries and sectors participated in a workshop on taxing SSBs convened at the Regional Office in September 2016. It was the first in a series of activities to support Member States with advocacy, development and strengthening tax policies for SSBs.

School-based measures have proven especially effective. The June 2016 Regional Workshop on Regulating the Marketing and Sale of Foods and Non-alcoholic Beverages at Schools brought together participants from ministries of education and health to discuss health options. A follow-up guide on restricting the marketing and sale of unhealthy foods and sugary beverages was disseminated to school principals. The guide – *Be Smart, Drink Water* – has been translated into Chinese, and Bislama and French for the Pacific. ■