

**NATIONAL TASK FORCE (OR EQUIVALENT)
FOR MALARIA ELIMINATION:**

THE CASE OF THAILAND



CONTENTS

| | |
|--|---|
| Malaria in Thailand | 1 |
| Thailand's national task force for malaria elimination | 1 |
| Committee roles and responsibilities | 2 |
| Achievements | 3 |
| Challenges faced by the National task Force | 4 |
| Key lessons learnt | 4 |



INTERSECTORAL COLLABORATION FOR MALARIA ELIMINATION IN THAILAND

As one of the countries at the epicentre of antimalarial drug resistance and facing continued incidence of indigenous cases and malaria deaths, Thailand is following an ambitious and wide-ranging malaria elimination strategy. In 2015, national malaria elimination steering and administrative committees were established to support the elimination target set by the Office of Prime Minister and the National Committee on Sustainable Development Goals.

The Malaria Elimination Operational Plan (2017–2021) and budget proposal for THB2.28 billion (\$69.9 million) was endorsed on April 26 2016 by the Office of Prime Minister, and multi-sectoral and community-based initiatives have been launched to tackle malaria and support elimination both within the health sector and beyond.

Malaria in Thailand

In 2010 there were 32,480 reported indigenous cases of malaria in Thailand. The country adopted the World Health Organization Global Malaria Programme agenda in 2013, and the following year signed the regional agreement to move towards elimination, at the 9th East Asia Summit meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. In March 2015, the national target of malaria elimination by 2024 was ratified by the Office of the Prime Minister.

Thailand is considered to be on target to achieve a more than 40% reduction in case incidence by 2020. By 2016 the number dropped to 12,076 cases, leading to 27 deaths.¹ In 2017 there were just 5,698 indigenous cases and 11 malaria deaths.² However, the country continues to be one of the five Greater Mekong subregion (GMS) countries that battles antimalarial drug resistance, and *P. falciparum* resistance to artemisinin is a continuing public health threat. Porous borders with neighbouring GMS countries and large migrant and mobile populations in the area also makes malaria elimination a pressing need for Thailand.

Thailand's national task force for malaria elimination

The APLMA Leaders' Roadmap, endorsed by Thailand, calls for each malaria endemic country to consider establishing a National Malaria Elimination Task Force (or similar body), chaired by a senior central agency official, to help maintain momentum and financial support behind the elimination effort, which is otherwise at risk of waning as cases drop to very small numbers. Thailand set up the National Committee on Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, which include the target of malaria

¹World Malaria Report 2018. Geneva:World Health Organization; 2018. <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/275867/9789241565653-eng.pdf?ua=1>

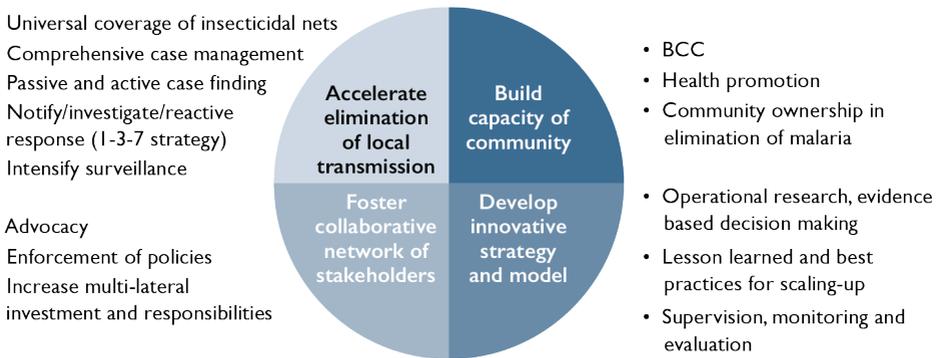
²APLMA Leaders Dashboard 2017 http://aplma.org/upload/resource/files/Leaders_Dashboard_Alphabet.pdf

elimination. To achieve this goal, the Prime Minister appointed two committees in March 2015 to drive policy, provide oversight on strategy and monitor progress of Malaria Elimination Programme implementation: the National Malaria Elimination Steering Committee, and the National Malaria Elimination Administrative Committee. The committees are scheduled to meet at least once a year.

Committee roles and responsibilities

The National Committees have adopted the four strategic objectives outlined in the National Malaria Elimination Strategy 2012-2021 (Figure 1). The committees represent all government ministries and agencies, professional associations, civil society organizations, and technical agencies. The Bureau of Vector-Borne Diseases and the National Malaria Control Programme coordinate efforts for each ministry and agency to develop their workplan for malaria elimination. The Bureau then provides targets to the Office of Disease Prevention and Control, and each province and district develops a local multi-sectoral plan to meet their target.

Figure 1: Thailand’s National Malaria Elimination Strategy 2012-2021



The National Malaria Elimination Steering Committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, is a high level committee of policy makers tasked with setting and driving policy to achieve malaria elimination targets. This committee reports to the National Committee on Sustainable Development Goals. It integrates the malaria elimination workplan, budget and implementation process and coordinates all public sector, enterprises and local administration organizations that are responsible for translating policy into practice. It also seeks out opportunities for collaboration with stakeholders and partners in the private sector, civil society, and community for sustainable implementation of the elimination agenda.

The National Malaria Elimination Administrative Committee, chaired by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health, is a high level committee of decision makers to provide administrative oversight to ensure progression of malaria elimination targets. This committee reports to the National Malaria Elimination Steering Committee. It reviews the malaria situation and target population, challenges, and level of resources and supports needed, and develops the required technical tools and resources to translate policy and into practice. It provides consultation and recommendations in technical areas, and reports on the outcome of implementation to the Steering Committee on Malaria Elimination of Thailand.

There are also four strategic sub-committees:

- Strategy 1 – Accelerate elimination of local transmission;
- Strategy 2 – Develop technology, innovative strategy and model (including the Malaria Monitoring and Evaluation Board and the Malaria Research Advisory Group);
- Strategy 3 – Foster collaborative network of stakeholders; and
- Strategy 4 – Build capacity of the community.

Since it was set up in early 2015, the committee has been very active in driving a programme of consultative meetings and planning workshops with technical experts from academia, international nongovernmental organizations, World Health Organization and subnational health offices.

Achievements

The Malaria Elimination Operational (2017-2021) and budget proposal for THB2.28 billion (\$69.9 million) was endorsed by the Office of Prime Minister, and allocated to the Ministry of Public Health and other ministries. The strategy for sub-national mobilization of resources from local administrative organizations (sub-district level) was implemented in the 2018 financial year. The National Malaria Elimination Steering Committee engaged in advocacy for these decisions and endorsed the government's budget for them.

In addition to the two national committees on malaria elimination, provinces and districts can set up their own malaria elimination committee, and can also set up an emergency outbreak committee under the Infectious Disease Act. For example, in Sisaket province, a multi-sector approach to identify and respond to a malaria outbreak –Emergency Outbreak Response (Sisaket)–was set up, including an Emergency Outbreak Response Committee chaired by provincial governor. The committee membership included a network of all government agencies including military, police, border patrol, forest rangers, civil society organizations, and local administrators. The committee meets weekly to monitor progress.

Thailand also launched the Bajor Model, an initiative on community participation in malaria elimination to empower community organizations. It helps community leaders identify needs, mobilize resources, and implement measures to eliminate malaria in their community. Thailand has improved access to malaria interventions for some vulnerable populations, such as illegal logging workers, ethnic minorities, and residents in politically unstable areas. All tests and treatment are free of charge at all service delivery points. Thailand has also worked to build trust and understanding between health care workers and communities at risk, foster acceptance and coverage of interventions, and engage communities in malaria elimination. A key component of this has been the creation of village-level Malaria Post, based on community ownership, acceptance and participation.

By 2017 there were Malaria Posts in over 500 villages across 27 provinces with malaria transmission.³ Malaria Posts also promote malaria education and prevention services.

Challenges faced by the National task Force

Against a backdrop of declining malaria infections, it is difficult to maintain vigilance, political will, resources, especially against competing demand on resources and manpower from other communicable diseases. Improved coordination with neighbouring countries is needed, as well as additional resources to target non-Thai and cross-border populations at risk of malaria.

Key lessons learnt

- Evidence generated by the national program and implementing partners has supported successful advocacy to gain commitment from the Thai government.
- Participatory processes were used to set and define national targets and indicators. These targets and indicators are then disseminated to regional and provincial level to implement according to local context
- National committees are important in order to drive policies and ensure political commitment, as well as to advocate for other ministries and local governments to participate in malaria elimination and reaching target groups.

³ Malaria Posts. Ministry of Public Health Thailand. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44wnW0gNw5Q>





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