

The Malaysian National Plan of Action for Nutrition II (2006-2015) is a master blueprint for nutrition interventions in the country.

IN the second instalment of *NutriScene* this year (January 28, 2007), I had highlighted that several nutrition activities and programmes have been planned for the year. The main ones are the National Plan of Action for Nutrition II, the Nutrition Society of Malaysia annual scientific conference and the Nutrition Month Malaysia.

Subsequently, I had written about the Nutrition Society scientific conference and Nutrition Month in two separate articles. In this write-up, I would like to provide some details on another major nutrition focus in the country, namely the master blueprint for nutrition programmes and activities for the next 10 years, the National Plan of Action for Nutrition of Malaysia (NPANM) II (2006-2015).

The birth of NPANM I

Community nutrition intervention programmes have been documented in the country since the 1960s. Over the last 40 years, different government agencies had carried out programmes to improve the nutritional status of the population. The most notable programme of the early days is probably the Applied Food and Nutrition Programme (AFNP).

The first effort to coordinate programmes in nutrition intervention in the country amongst various agencies began in the early 1990s, under the purview of the National Coordinating Committee on Food and Nutrition (NCCFN).

The formation of the NCCFN followed the International Conference on Nutrition organised jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) in 1992.

In this landmark conference, over 160 nations adopted the World Declaration on Nutrition and Plan of Action (NPAN). Following this conference, Malaysia, as did many other nations, formulated NPAN of Malaysia as a collaborative effort between various government agencies, academia, professional bodies and industry.

NPANM I describes in detail strategies of all relevant stakeholders to combat nutritional disorders for the period 1996 to 2000. Activities were identified to tackle both under- and over-nutrition problems.

National Nutrition Policy

NPANM I had recommended the formulation of a National Nutrition Policy. A Technical Working Group, comprising senior professionals from various agencies was set up for the task. For the first time in the country, a National Nutrition Policy was formulated and approved by the Cabinet in December 2003.

The National Nutrition Policy of Malaysia endeavours to achieve and maintain the nutritional well-being of Malaysians to enable them to contribute effectively towards nation building, in line with Vision 2020. The Policy aims to provide access to adequate, nutritious, safe

Plan of action



Promoting optimal infant and young children feeding practices is one of the strategies to meet the objectives of the National Plan of Action. – AP

and quality food for all. It will promote and support strategies for the practice of healthy eating.

The Policy will integrate and synergise the efforts of relevant stakeholders in planning, implementing and evaluating food and nutrition programmes that are effective and sustainable.

The implementation of the National Nutrition Policy of Malaysia is under the purview of the National Food Safety and Nutrition Council, which is chaired by the Minister of Health.

The National Coordinating Committee on Food and Nutrition (NCCFN) will serve as the coordinator and technical advisor to the National Food Safety and Nutrition Council. The policy will be translated into effective and viable plans through the revised National Plan of Action for Nutrition in Malaysia.

A system of monitoring and evaluation will be put in place to ensure effective implementation of the Policy. The objectives for monitoring and evaluation of the policy are:

- To ensure that the Policy will be implemented as planned and the objectives are met

- To identify the problems and constraints in implementing the Policy

- To improve the management and performance of the Policy

The monitoring and evaluation of the Policy will be conducted periodically. It will be coordinated by the National Coordinating Committee on Food and Nutrition and administered in synergy by several ministries, agencies, professional bodies and non-governmental organisations through various Technical Working Groups.

NPAN II – the master blueprint for 2006-2015

malnutrition

- Reducing micronutrient deficiency
- Reducing overweight and obesity
- Preventing and controlling diet-related non-communicable diseases

Strategies to meet objectives of NPAN

To ensure effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Plan of Action, strategies of the Plan are oriented into the Foundation, Enabling and Facilitating Strategies

The Foundation Strategy of “Incorporating nutrition objectives, considerations and components into national developmental policies and programmes” forms the overarching strategy and is vital for the effective operation of the Plan

The Five Enabling Strategies, identified as having direct impact on achieving the specific objectives of the Plan, are:

- Improving household food security, especially amongst the low income group
- Promoting optimal infant and young children feeding practices
- Preventing and controlling nutritional deficiencies
- Promoting healthy eating and active living
- Supporting efforts to protect consumers in food quality and safety

The Five Facilitating Strategies provide the mechanism and support for the realisation of the

With developments in the country in recent years, including marked changes in lifestyle and the food and nutrition situation in the country, it was deemed necessary that the NPAN I be reviewed.

The entire review process was rather thorough, with efforts put in to obtain input from various government agencies, academia, non-government organisations, professional bodies and the private sectors.

Activities outlined in NPAN I and achievements over the years guided the identification of programmes and activities in the revised Plan. Current and emerging issues in nutrition were taken into consideration in the revision to ensure that the Plan is relevant and appropriate. The NCCFN released the revised NPAN for 2006-2015 (termed NPAN II) last year. The revised Plan was drafted in consonance with the National Nutrition Policy.

The general objective of NPANM II is to achieve and maintain optimal nutritional well-being of Malaysians. Two specific objectives have been identified; these are to:

- Enhance the nutritional status of the population, and
- Prevent and control diet-related non-communicable diseases.

To meet the objectives of NPANM II, indicators and targets were set for six specific areas, namely:

- Improving breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices
- Improving food intake and dietary practices
- Reducing protein-energy



One of the aims of the National Plan of Action is to reduce overweight and obesity. – AP

Enabling Strategies. These are:

- Ensuring that all have access to nutrition information
- Continuous assessment and monitoring of the nutrition situation

- Promoting continuous research and development
- Ensuring nutrition and dietetics are practised by trained professionals
- Strengthening institutional capacity in nutritional activities

For each of the above strategies, various activities have been identified, each with its estimated time frame, performance indicators, target and implementing agency identified.

It would not be possible for me to describe each of these strategies and the activities in this write up. I will be elaborating on some of the strategies more relevant to public



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health nutrition in future articles.

Realising the objectives of NPAN II

This article serves to highlight the existence of NPAN II in this country. It is always important to start with having a great plan in place. A great deal of thought and effort has gone into drafting this Plan. It was a tedious process and we had many hours of deliberations. I do hope it will become a truly useful master plan in guiding nutrition intervention programmes in the country. You will have noticed from this article that the Plan covers practically all aspects of the food and nutrition issues.

The Plan has to be given the widest publicity so that the relevant stakeholders can participate effectively. In addition to the traditional hard copies, we must make full use of the electronic media to ensure rapid dissemination of the document to any and every part of the country.

Nutrition interventions involve professionals from a variety of disciplines. I do hope all relevant stakeholders will have access to the Plan.

Implementing NPAN II is challenging. It is recognised that the Plan should be implemented with the guiding principle of close collaboration within a multi-sectorial framework. This makes it all the more challenging.

In my 10-year association with NCCFN, I have noted that the commitment from some partner-agencies in implementing NPAN is lacking. Advocacy to these agencies, to sensitise them to the Plan and to help them participate in the planned activities, require careful attention.

The NCCFN has the overall purview to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Plan. Appropriate Technical Working Groups (TWG) and committees have been established to focus on relevant nutritional issues to implement activities accordingly. These include TWG for Nutrition Policy, Nutrition Guidelines, Nutrition Training, Nutrition Research, and Nutrition Promotion.

The Plan is ready; the system is in place. It requires the collaboration of all stakeholders to implement the activities. It requires a champion to propel the Plan.

■ NutriScene is a fortnightly column by Dr Tee E Siong, who pens his thoughts as a nutritionist with over 30 years of experience in the research and public health arena. For further information, e-mail starhealth@thestar.com.my.

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