

**Union Minister's opening remarks on
"Strengthening Collaboration with Implementing Partners"**

Lake View Resort Hotel

Nay Pyi Taw

2nd November 2016

Good morning!

Representatives from UN agencies and organizations, INGOs, local NGOs and officials of the Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS) and specially invited guests

I am glad to see many of our close partners attending this workshop on "Strengthening Collaboration with Implementing Partners of MoHS".

I am also confident and hoping that we will have a very down-to-earth, doable and useful outputs and outcomes from this workshop in terms of intensifying the collaboration between MoHS, INGOs and like-minded partners.

Strengthening country's or MoHS capacity in coordination and management of health activities carried out in the country is becoming increasingly important because there are so many players and partners operating in the health arena. New players are emerging rapidly, often with substantial funding support from various sources or donors.

Currently, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP, UNOPS, other UN agencies, the World Bank, Global Fund, GAVI, USAID, DFID, JICA, AusAid, international and national NGOs, philanthropic organizations, etc. are working in the field of public health. Without proper coordination and systematic management, it can lead to:

- (i) Duplication of efforts of several players resulting in wasting of resources;

- (ii) Confusion of the recipient country due to competing priorities proposed by different players;
- (iii) Priority proposals or activities of these players may not be in alignment with the national priorities and policies;
- (iv) The inability of the recipient country to cope with increasing demand or requirements of various players as human resources that are available in MoHS are finite.

I would like to put a record that, on behalf of MoHS, together with my senior staff, State and Regional directors, I appreciate the work done by all INGOs, UN agencies, organizations, foundations and other entities which are rendering public health care services to the population of our country, especially to underserved and in remote areas.

However, I have noted that many of our INGOs are tackling or concentrating more on HIV/AIDS, Malaria and TB and budget utilized are also high.

It is high time to consider whether we are effectively using our budget or INGOs budget only on a few areas. In the context of changing epidemiological conditions, prevalence and incidence of those diseases and conditions, I wish that INGOs and other organizations are also concentrating on school health, health education and communication, preparedness of outbreaks of diseases, logistics of EPI programs, monitoring and evaluation of various aspects of health programs, elderly health care, NCD as a whole, occupational health, dental public health, capacity building for BHS such as HA, PHS I, PHS II, midwives, LHV and capacity enhancement of Voluntary Health Workers (VHW).

INGOs, may wish to go through all the speeches delivered by me in many meetings, workshops and seminars. These are all posted in our website www.mohs.gov.mm. We will update the latest 6 or 7 speeches which we are yet to

put up soon. The speeches contain future direction of MoHS and areas of emphasis or areas needing priority attention.

The new emerging players are also very enthusiastic and, generally, Myanmar, welcome these new comers. However, given the diversity of mandates and procedures; coordination, prioritization and synchronization of work of these players are crucial.

It is pivotal for MoHS to deal effectively and efficiently with multiple players and like-minded partners in the field of health. It is also our duty to inform our partners on a regular basis on MoHS policies, strategies and priorities, National Health Plan (NHP), mode of work of MoHS such as some relevant internal procedures for them to follow. This is the duty of International Relations Department (IRD) of MoHS and I also plan to revamp and expand the IRD unit during this month with the proper division of labor and computerization of its work.

By the way, at the end of this opening session, I have asked the secretariat of this workshop to distribute a draft of my paper prepared in January 2016. The paper is somewhat relevant to this workshop. I hope you will enjoy reading it. Please do not quote or yet, as I am going to produce a book on public health very soon. The title of the book is “Reflection of a Public Health Professional: Sharing of Views and Thoughts”. It contains more than 30 chapters.

One of our aims of the workshop is that “all collaborative activities supported by INGOs and UN agencies and like-minded partners” must not only be linked to one another but also closely and strongly associated with national health policies, strategies and plans of the country.

Our challenge right now is how to systematically and chronologically map all the collaborative health activities and differential role played by, INGOs, UN agencies and like-minded partners working in the country.

In the process of having proper collaboration and coordination, it would prove useful if we can analyze the comparative advantages of each player. By doing so, it would reveal how each player can fulfill the priority needs of the country or MoHS.

Greater collaboration and coordination among the partners can reduce transaction costs for both recipients and partners; it can also ensure greater coherence and efficiency by focusing on respective comparative advantages and areas of expertise and strengths of each partner; it can ultimately ensure greater impact in the field of health development or public health domain.

When we are discussing on collaboration between MoHS and INGOs, UN agencies and organizations, we should not forget the role of state and regional public health officials, basic health staff, community-based organizations, civic societies working at the ground level.

I was also informed that we had a reporting system from INGOs to MoHS. But, the proportion of regular reporting was low and we could not give feedback to all as we have limited number of human resources. In coming months or years, we will strive to give feedback without fail.

Inter-INGOs relationship and dealings are also important. I hope these issues can be ironed out and easily resolved in the face-to-face encounter during this workshop. Conducting this workshop is one of the mechanisms that MoHS is initiating to augment the collaboration effectively with the like-minded partners or INGOs or UN agencies or organizations.

Like-minded partners' activities or interventions or strategies must be in the same direction as of MoHS activities or interventions or strategies. Thus, it can complement each other or supplement the activities of MoHS. There will be synergistic action through combination of activities.

This type of forum or workshop or platform to share MoHS views, ideas, strategies, interventions and activities is very conducive to achieving MoHS or country's road map in a clear cut manner to reach UHC in 2030 or so.

As there are many INGOs or development partners working in Myanmar, it is highly likely that there may be some duplication or redundancy of technical areas of work or even geographical areas. Each INGO or development partner may have different vision and mission statements as per their mandates informed by the respective funding agencies or organizations and governments.

Working together between two entities requires a lot of coordination and if the number of entities working together is more than one, we need to be very careful to achieving systematic coordination.

I am sure this workshop can shed some light or give answers as to how we could work more effectively and efficiently in the most appropriate manner.

We are in the midst of formulation of NHP. The time is very opportune.

One of the unique characteristics of this NHP (2016-2021) is involvement of all INGOs or like-minded partners in the formulation process. You all will be discussing collaborative mechanisms with MoHS within the framework of NHP in the weeks to come. The duty and responsibility of MoHS staff is to put as much as possible all INGOs and like-minded partners on board along our path to UHC.

How do we do it to achieve our common objectives of improving population health? It is a question that needs to be answered in this workshop to some extent.

Current MoHS strategies are more important than National Health Policy which we had developed in 1993. National Health Policy (1993) can, therefore, give overall boundary or framework only.

It is important that activities of INGOs must be in one way or the other link or even integrated with activities of MoHS; under the overall framework of NHP or national health policies and strategies of MoHS.

I would like to reiterate that NHP must be owned by all entities working in the country.

Before we consider all the above points, we need to do mapping of all activities of INGOs in terms of technical areas of work as well as geographical areas to further cross reference with activities of MoHS.

As a matter of fact, mapping of vision, mission statements, strategies, interventions and activities of all INGOs will greatly facilitate the collaborative process.

As MoHS is the central body, all INGOs, will have to align themselves to work in the same direction as MoHS and also within the overall umbrella of strategies and current policies of MoHS.

Another area which deserves attention is “key intervention of activities of all INGOs, must be relayed to MoHS using a very simple format either quarterly or six monthly basics”.

This is for the purpose of knowing whether we are on the right track or not, also for resource allocation of MoHS to achieve our common objectives.

This workshop should also be our platform or forum either formally or informally to share views and information of INGOs with officials of MoHS working at different levels of the health care delivery system (HCDS).

In conclusion, we hope that, based on the outcome of this workshop,

- NHP is becoming “real national health plan”
- NHP is owned by all players and stakeholders
- Monitoring and evaluation of activities NHP (2016-2021) would become overarching activities
- Monitoring process is becoming more realistic and practical
- Every concerned entity will be put on board
- Sharing of data, information, challenges and experiences would become a routine process
- I strongly believe that we all can shape the best framework of our future direction by effectively working together for health development and call all of you to frankly discuss and fully participate in this workshop proactively.

My take home messages are:

“Let us work together harmoniously in the same direction, complementing and supplementing each other, to achieve our common goal of improving the health status of the population of Myanmar.”

“Let us overcome the challenges, constraints and obstacles by way of working closely without hesitation and reservation. After all, we all are marching in the same direction under the overall framework of National Health Plan, National Health Policy and Strategies”.

Thank you.