Key mission findings

1. The Tonga Strategic Development Framework II (2015-2025) includes integrated approaches to address NCDs. The Government of Tonga has localized and mainstreamed the SDGs into its SDF II. In 2015, the UN Country Team, in collaboration with UNDP Tonga, supported the Government of Tonga to localize SDF II and established a roadmap for localizing the SDGs in Tonga.

2. Two STEPS reports have been published in the last three years.

3. NCD risk factors have stabilized and even, in some cases, improved between 2004 and 2012.

4. The government plans to continue increasing taxes on unhealthy products and reducing taxes on healthy ones.

5. Additional investments are planned to create facilities to promote physical activity.

6. The government has been proactive in introducing tobacco control initiatives, such as taxation.

7. More than 50% of Tongan household expenditures are on imported food, and a large proportion of these products contain high levels of sugar, salt or fatty contents.

8. Some Pacific Islands states have succeeded in overturning import bans for some of these products as part of ongoing efforts to join the World Trade Organization.

9. Socio-cultural factors around food and feasting has meant that calorie intake is high.

10. Government ministries and the churches are the two important institutions with major influence on Knowledge-Attitude-Practice-Behaviour change to prevent and control NCDs among Tongan people.

11. A small and efficient UN Country Team has prioritized NCDs, and put in place mechanisms for joint efforts with the support from colleagues at the subregional, regional and global level.

“The Government of Tonga welcomes the efforts by UN agencies and organizations in working together to prevent and control NCDs, the major disease in the Kingdom of Tonga, as well as the technical and financial support they have provided to our country.”

Mr. Viliami Va’inga Tone
CEO for Foreign Affairs and Trade,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Tonga

“Many UN agencies in Tonga have a role to play in working through their counterpart ministries to strengthen multi-sectoral actions on NCDs. This would be a concrete achievement in celebration of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations.”

Dr. Saia Piukala
Minister of Health, Kingdom of Tonga

“Some of the challenges on NCDs are still ahead of us, including obesity, diabetes, hypertension and insufficient health coverage in remote outer island.”

Dr. Saia Piukala
Minister of Health, Kingdom of Tonga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key adult NCD mortality and risk factors*</th>
<th>diet-related chronic diseases constitute the greatest cause of death in Tonga</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No data available for premature mortality from NCDs</td>
<td>22% are insufficiently physical active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27% smoke tobacco</td>
<td>24% have diabetes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41% are obese</td>
<td>20% have hypertension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink 1.6 litres of pure alcohol per person per year</td>
<td>73% eat insufficient amounts of fruit and vegetables</td>
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*Indicates that diet-related chronic diseases constitute the greatest cause of death in Tonga.
Key recommendations

1. All UN agencies in Tonga should meet every 2 months to plan NCD-related activities.

2. The Parliamentary Health Committee needs to: (a) give a high priority to NCD prevention and control; (b) hold ministries accountable for the national NCD strategy; and (c) ensure that all policies and legislation which come before Parliament are assessed for their impacts on NCDs.

3. The UN Country Team should provide regular written and oral briefings for parliamentarians to encourage them to provide leadership on NCDs within their constituencies.

4. The Church needs to become a strategic partner in championing action on NCDs.

5. The Ministry of Health and WHO need to organize meetings and/or workshops with other stakeholders to ensure that the actions of these partners are aligned with the global NCD Action Plan.

6. A costed National Multi-Sectoral NCD Strategy prioritizing the most cost-effective actions and targets needs to be formulated.

7. The government needs to continue to raise taxes on tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy foods and beverages.

8. An effective national NCD communication strategy needs to be developed and implemented.

Adding value: actions taken following the mission

1. The National Food Authority in Tonga was approved by the Cabinet, and launched in January 2016.

2. A National Food Council was established in January 2016.

3. In December 2015, a training workshop on the Tonga Food Act of 2014 convened by the WHO Country Liaison Office for Tonga, in cooperation with the MoH and Ministry for Agriculture, Food, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFFF), and FAO, addressed issues such as: (a) the implementation of the Tonga Food Act 2014, including the operation of the National Food Authority; (b) cross-sectoral collaboration; and (c) the capacity of MAFFF and MoH to implement technical aspects of the 2014 Tonga Food Act.

4. Participants concurred that the ongoing formulation of food regulations under the Food Act provided an opportunity to formulate regulations and standards on food content and information, and marketing controls. To further advance this work, they agreed on the need for: (a) structured collaboration mechanisms; (b) training and capacity building; (c) development of guiding documents; (d) support to food businesses were needed; (e) actively use trade statistics to guide formulation policy measures; and (f) strengthen monitoring and evaluation of national food control efforts.

Next steps

1. Local UN agencies and organizations will meet on a bi-monthly basis in 2016.

2. WHO will continue to lead the joint UN work on NCDs in Tonga.

3. Consideration for a follow-up Joint UN Task Force mission to maintain momentum.

“In the past 3 years, Tonga’s STEPS reports show that most NCD indicators in Tonga are improving. Physical activity has achieved the global target by 4.6 times and 13 years earlier. Tobacco tax has increased by a further 19%.”

Dr. Dan Li
WHO Country Liaison Officer/Head of WHO Office, Tonga

Additional information on the status of NCDs in Tonga can be found on the WHO NCD DataFinder app.