

## Guest Editorial

### Understanding Health in All Policies: What and Why This Approach, and How to Ensure it in Public Policy Making?

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**H**ealth in All Policies (HiAP) approach to public policies has assumed increasing importance in recent years. In this paper, the concept is defined, tracing its evolution and highlighting its importance in public policymaking. The HiAP approach is then elaborated and a framework is introduced as a tool for the application of concept, identifying multi-sectoral structure, as an actor in the policy process.

**What is it:** HiAP approach is defined as "an approach to public policies across sectors that systematically takes into account the health and health systems implications of decisions, seeks synergies, and avoids harmful health impacts, in order to improve population health and health equity<sup>1</sup>." This definition is crafted in the backlog that although a well-functioning health system contributes, it is social, economic and environmental conditions, in which people are born, grow, work, live and age, that determine the health status and health outcomes. These conditions are called 'social determinants of health'.

**Evolution of concept:** The concept draws on the Constitution of World Health Organization, 1946, which states, "Governments have a responsibility for the health of their people which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures". It is rooted in primary health care approach (1978), articulated as intersectoral collaboration for health care delivery. It was then introduced as Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986), Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2005) and several developments in the follow up<sup>2</sup>. But, as a term, Health in All Policies was coined in 2006, followed in 2013 by a publication in Finland<sup>3</sup>. This treatise advocates engaging a broader array of partners organised as multisectoral structure to sustain the collaboration and mechanisms for ensuring a health and equity lens in

decision making processes across the 'whole of government'.

**Why use HiAP:** The social determinants of health concern predominantly the non-health sectors, like education, water and sanitation, food security and safety, housing, road and occupational safety etc. These sectors frame public policies that might, unwillingly though, have negative impacts on the health of people<sup>4</sup>: one of the manifestations being the rising burden of non-communicable diseases. The HiAP approach, in this context, recognizing that health outcomes are influenced due also to factors beyond health sector, integrates and articulates such considerations into the public policymaking.

**HiAP approach:** It presents a framework for public policy process, It envisages four activities: information, consultation, engaging, and collaboration conducted in succession, albeit iteratively. The policy process begins with 'information' exchange, e.g. about health implications of non-health sector policy. This may happen in meetings and forums, which are excellent forum also for the consultation and building consensus on goals, while the multisectoral structure is catalytic in engaging and forging collaboration for assuring synergies between plans and avoiding harmful health impacts of non-health sector policies.

The policy, framed using HiAP approach, with the prospects of improving population health and health equity, is likely to attract resources and commitment to its implementation. As a part of the latter, there is monitoring and evaluation for its health effects and learning lessons, implying policy termination, succession or replacement, and feeding into the policy process. The non-health sectors can use this approach while framing public policy and or

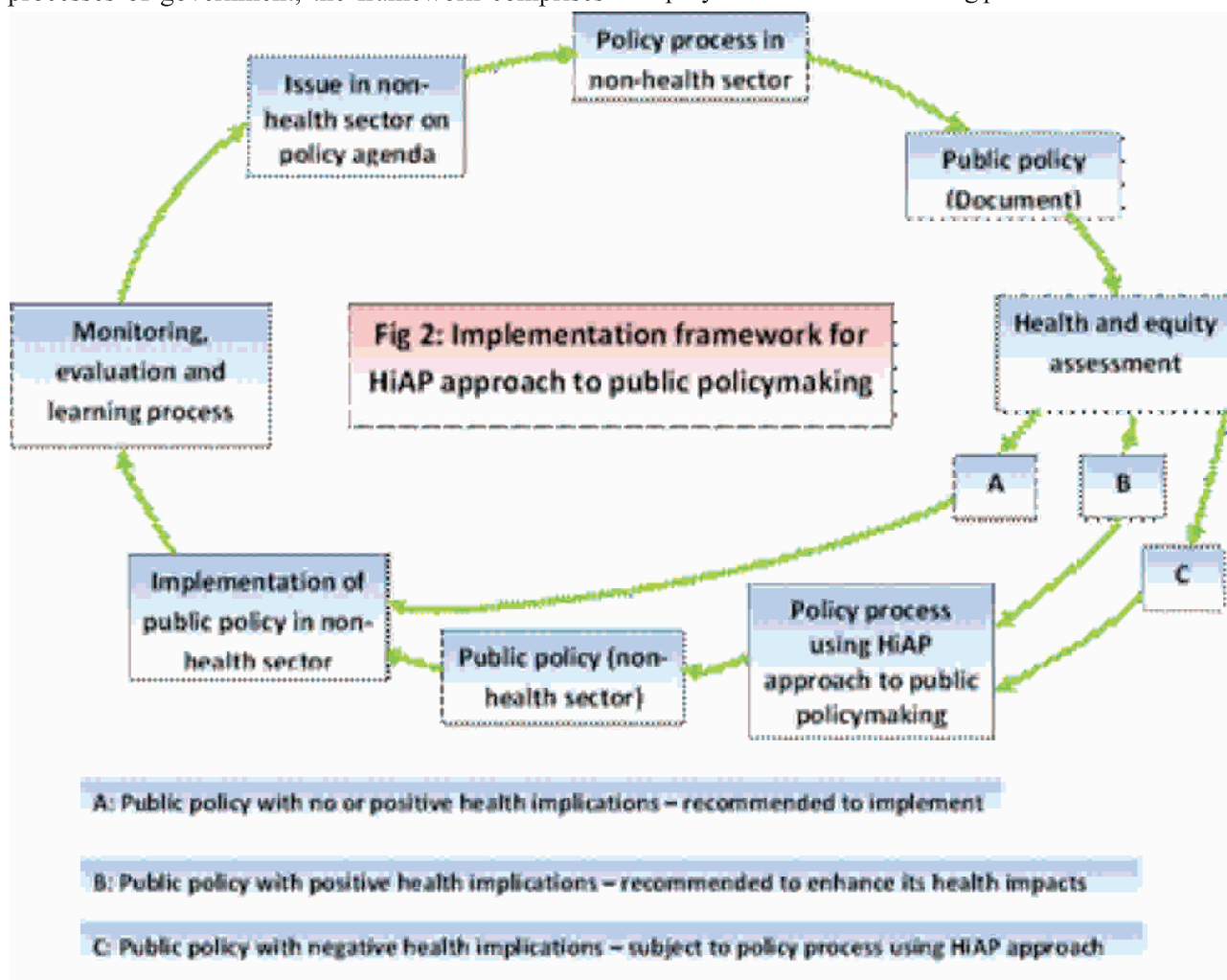
revising a policy, which is found, consequent to ‘health and equity impact assessment’, to be less healthy or non-healthy.

**Role of health and non-health sectors:** In employing HiAP approach to public policymaking, as in figure 1, health sector has a role to advocates, informs, and convenes structures for multisectoral consultation and engagement and facilitating and collaborating for evidence informed policy process. The non-health sectors (like public sector line ministries, academia, professional councils, multi-lateral and bilateral agencies and civil society organisations), which are caretakers of policy, together with health sectors, partner and equally influence, how the public policy process is conducted using HiAPs approach.

**Implementation framework:** suggested as a tool to “embed” and “institutionalize” the HiAP approach within the processes of government, the framework comprises

three interlinked iterative processes. As indicated in Figure 2, a public policy, framed as a result of the policy process in a non-health sector, is subjected to ‘health and equity impact assessment’. The result of the assessment can fall under three categories: (A) a policy with no or positive health impacts or ‘healthy policy’. In that case, the non-health sector is allowed to implement it; (B) policy can be made more ‘healthy’ or ‘health friendly’ or (C) policy is ‘not healthy’ and is likely to have untoward or negative effects on health. In both these instances (B and C), the policy is subjected to the policy process using HiAP approach. The policy framed, as a result of this exercise, is implemented and monitored and evaluated for learning lessons to feed into the cycle of planning for policy.

**Multisectoral structure:** Such structures, which can provide organised forums to sustain intersectoral collaboration and mechanisms for ensuring a health and equity lens in decision making processes across the ‘whole



of government’, can be established under law like Public Health Act. In this Act, there can be provision for establishing a multisectoral structure like a Public Health Committee to foster cooperation and coordination of non-health sectors, monitoring for effective health services delivery and specifically adopting health in all policies approach to addressing social determinants of health.

**The way forward:** Once the Public Health Act is enacted, the actions required for implementing HiAP approach to public policymaking, inter-alia, include: (i) frame rules and regulations with regard to the functioning of multisectoral Public Health Committee; (ii) define terms of reference and identify a third party, preferably an academic institute for conducting ‘health and equity impact assessment’; and (iii) develop capacity, enabling the policy and planning department in ministry of health for effective advocacy, information exchange, and convene multisectoral consultation and engagement, and

facilitate and collaborate for evidence informed policy process for ‘healthy policies’.

### Reference

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