

Did you know?

Markets are more than places where people buy food. They shape what people eat, the products they are exposed to, and the choices they make every day. As cities across the WHO South-East Asia Region work to address the **Commercial Determinants of Health (CDoH)**, healthy marketplaces are emerging as an important way for local governments to create environments that support healthier lives.

During the WHO Regional Workshop on Commercial Determinants of Health, participants explored how local governments can shape healthier commercial environments. Rather than focusing solely on individual behaviour, the discussion highlighted the role of cities in influencing the systems that determine what products are available, affordable, and promoted in everyday life.

Two member cities—**Dharan, Nepal**, and **Huanakham, Thailand**—shared complementary approaches that demonstrate how healthier markets require both community engagement and effective governance.

Case Study: Dharan, Nepal



Market monitoring team inspecting vendors. Source: Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City

Strengthening healthy markets through good governance

For **Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City**, creating a healthy marketplace begins with effective governance.

Located in eastern Nepal, Dharan is home to more than 166,000 residents and operates three major markets alongside approximately twenty smaller local markets. These marketplaces are central to daily life, selling fresh produce, groceries, medicines, livestock, household goods, restaurants, as well as tobacco and alcohol products.

Recognising both the opportunities and risks within these commercial spaces, the city introduced the **Dharan Market Monitoring Guideline** in 2018. Rather than relying on occasional inspections, Dharan established a structured monitoring system supported by Local Market Management Committees, municipal police, and a dedicated multi-sector Market Monitoring Team.



Market monitoring team inspecting vendors. Source: Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City

Routine monitoring covers a wide range of public health issues, including food quality and hygiene, licensing of tobacco, alcohol and animal products, expiry dates, pesticide residues, waste management, sanitation, and compliance with national food safety standards. Findings are compiled into monthly reports to support continuous improvement and accountability.

A key strength of Dharan's approach is collaboration. The city established a **Consumer Right Protection Committee**, chaired by the Deputy Mayor, bringing together representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and Industries, civil society, technical agencies, security authorities, and elected officials. By engaging with multiple sectors, Dharan demonstrates that maintaining healthy markets is a shared responsibility rather than the sole task of health authorities.

Through strong governance, regular monitoring, and coordinated action, Dharan has created a marketplace system that protects consumers while fostering healthier and safer commercial environments.



Source: Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City

Case Study: Huanakham, Thailand



Local Green Market. Source: Huanakham Subdistrict Municipality

Encouraging healthier choices through community action

While Dharan focuses on governance, **Huanakham Subdistrict Municipality** demonstrates how healthy markets can be built through community participation and behaviour change.

For Huanakham, a healthy market is not simply a place that sells fruits and vegetables. It is defined as **a sustainable economic system that promotes well-being, safe food, and alternative medicine**, recognising that health and local economic development go hand in hand.

This vision is reflected in the municipality's health promotion programmes, which encourage residents to shift their mindset from **"eating to live"** toward **"eating to prevent illness."** School-based nutrition programmes introduce healthy eating habits early in life, while initiatives targeting adults over 35 encourage reduced salt and sugar consumption to lower the risk of noncommunicable diseases.



Testing for chemical contaminants at a local market. Source: Huanakham Subdistrict Municipality

Beyond public education, Huahakham works directly with market vendors to improve the local food environment. Through vendor training, safe food handling practices, chemical contamination testing, regular market cleaning, and support for the **Local Green Market**, the municipality is making healthier food more available, safer, and more appealing to residents. Together, these initiatives demonstrate how local governments can shape healthier food environments by working alongside vendors and communities—not simply by asking individuals to make healthier choices.



Market Cleaning Day. Source: Huanakham Subdistrict Municipality

Healthy Markets Require Both People and Policy

Although Dharan and Huanakham have adopted different strategies, both cities illustrate an important lesson from the workshop: **healthy markets do not happen by chance.**

Dharan demonstrates how governance, regulation, and multi-sector coordination create the systems needed to protect public health. Huanakham shows how those systems can be complemented by community engagement, healthier food environments, and partnerships with local vendors that encourage healthier choices in everyday life.

Together, these examples reflect the broader message of the WHO workshop on Commercial Determinants of Health: **local governments are powerful market shapers.** Through policies, monitoring, education, partnerships, and urban governance, cities can influence the products people encounter, the environments they experience, and ultimately the health of their communities.

As cities continue to address the Commercial Determinants of Health, healthy marketplaces offer a practical and achievable starting point—demonstrating how thoughtful governance and community participation can work together to create healthier, more resilient urban environments.

Editor’s Pick



Missed the live session?

Catch the recording of this regional workshop exploring how local governments can shape healthier commercial environments through healthier marketplaces, stronger governance, tobacco control, and safer public spaces.

Read more

Stay tuned for more inspiring stories from our healthy cities network in our next update!

Share with us your city's best practices!

Email Us

WHO South-East Asia office and Regional Laboratory on Urban Governance for Health and Well-being are pleased to invite you to join South-East Asia Region Healthy Cities Network.

More information and details here

Recommended Resources

Selected resources supporting this issue's theme

Briefing Notes for Commercial Determinants of Health

WHO's Economic and Commercial Determinants of Health in South-East Asia: Regional consultation Report

Further Reading & References

WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (WHO SEARO) & Regional Laboratory on Urban Governance for Health and Well-being (RL-UGHW). *Commercial Determinants of Health: Healthy Markets & Public Spaces – WHO Regional Workshop Summary and Key Takeaways*, 16 July 2026.

Huanakham Subdistrict Municipality. *Healthy Market Sharing (English & Thai Presentation)*, presented by Dr. Wannapakorn Sudtana, Director of the Public Health and Environment Division, July 2026.

Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City. *Healthy Marketplace presentation*, presented by Deepa Adhikari, Nursing Officer, Alpha Division, July 2026.

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