

The Cambodia Justice Police

Pragmatic approaches can work to clamp down on monotherapies and counterfeit drugs

Relevance to APLMA AQMTF

THEME 1: Ensuring the use of best-practice evidence-based therapies, consistent with international standards, and halting the use of oral mono-therapies and medicines that do not meet international standards

THEME 3: Enhancing access to and affordability of quality medicines, diagnostics and other malaria control products, including options for increasing production, improving quality of manufacturing, possible incentives for private sector producers and/or improving distribution where appropriate

Keeping counterfeit and substandard antimalarials off the street

In 2009, in an effort to halt the use of oral monotherapies, substandard and counterfeit medicines for malaria in areas where artemisinin resistance is already evident or at risk of developing, the Cambodian Ministry of Health created a police task force to help crack down on pharmacies selling these drugs over-the-counter.

The **Justice Police for the Ministry of Health**, as they are officially known, have the power to close down any pharmacies found to be selling counterfeit or substandard drugs, or those that are expired. The target areas for their activities are on the Cambodia-Thai border.

Bringing about change

A range of measures were introduced to inform the private sector and purchasing public of the ban on monotherapies. In Cambodia and to ensure the wider systems and structures were in place to deal with the counterfeit drug trade.

The ban on oral artemisinin monotherapy

- Official letter on ban of artemisinin monotherapies was issued by the Cambodia Ministry of Health (March 2009)
- Announcement disseminated to 54 private sector distributors at national level (April 2009)
- Key messages on the monotherapy ban for providers and consumers were broadcast through radio and TV spots and leaflets
- A provincial stakeholder meeting was held (July 2009)
- Drug inspectors trained with 70 participants from all provinces (December 2009)

Steps to fight counterfeit drugs

- Target private sector distributors were mapped across 10 provinces in Zones 1 and 2
- T-shirts were distributed to targeted drug outlets in areas with artemisinin resistance with messages on the danger of using of counterfeit drugs
- Central staff and provincial inspectors made quarterly monitoring visits of a sample of drug outlets in 10 Operational Districts

Strengthening regulatory capacity and enforcement

- 418 police trained to identify and investigate counterfeit antimalarials and enforce ban on oral artemisinin monotherapies
- Ministry of Interior and Cambodia National Malaria Programme staff conducted field visits to key provinces and border check points to discuss

Options for AQMTF Action

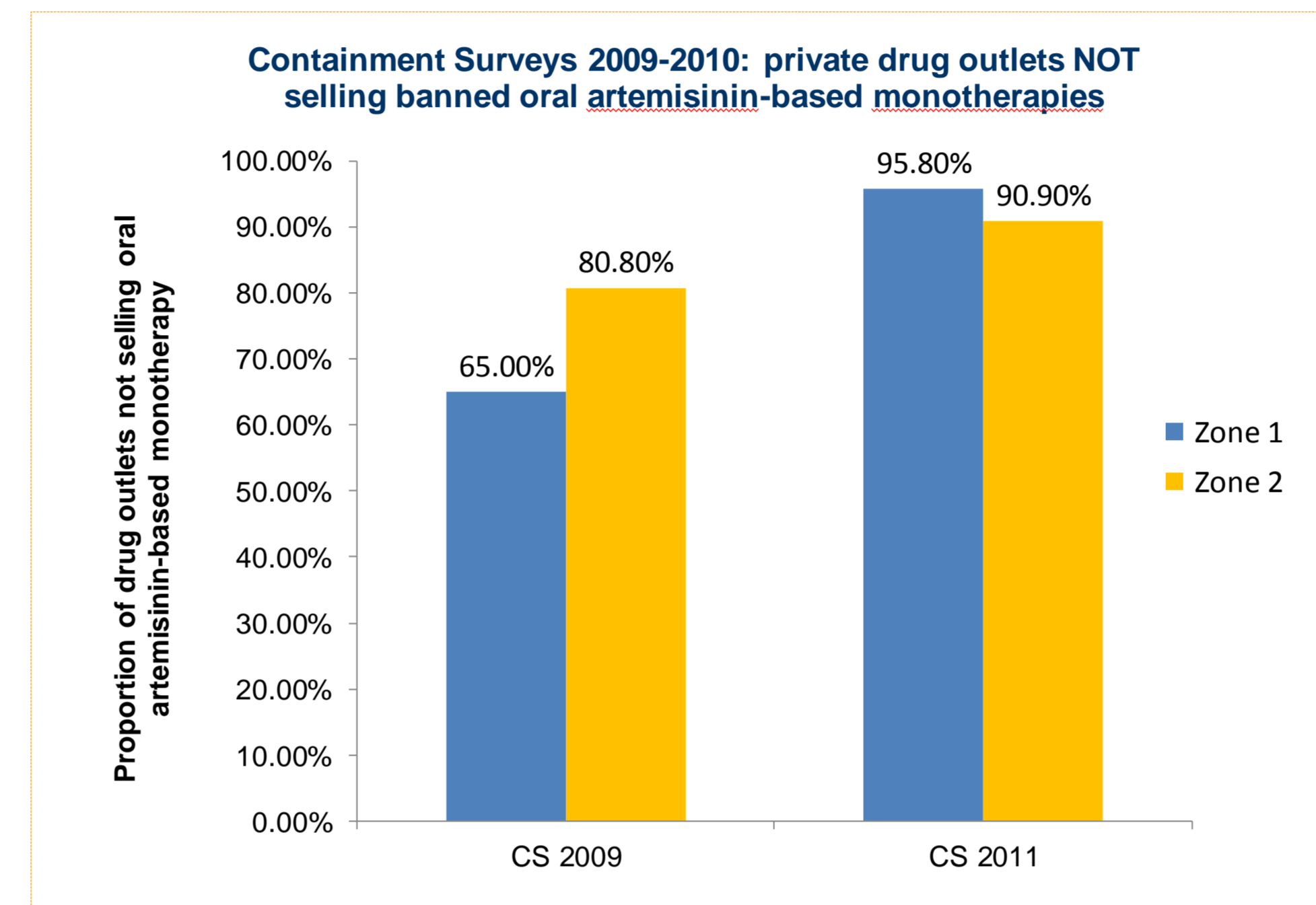
- AQMTF can advise APLMA on promoting regional strengthening of drug regulation
- AQMTF can explore support for regional capacity strengthening for drug analysis



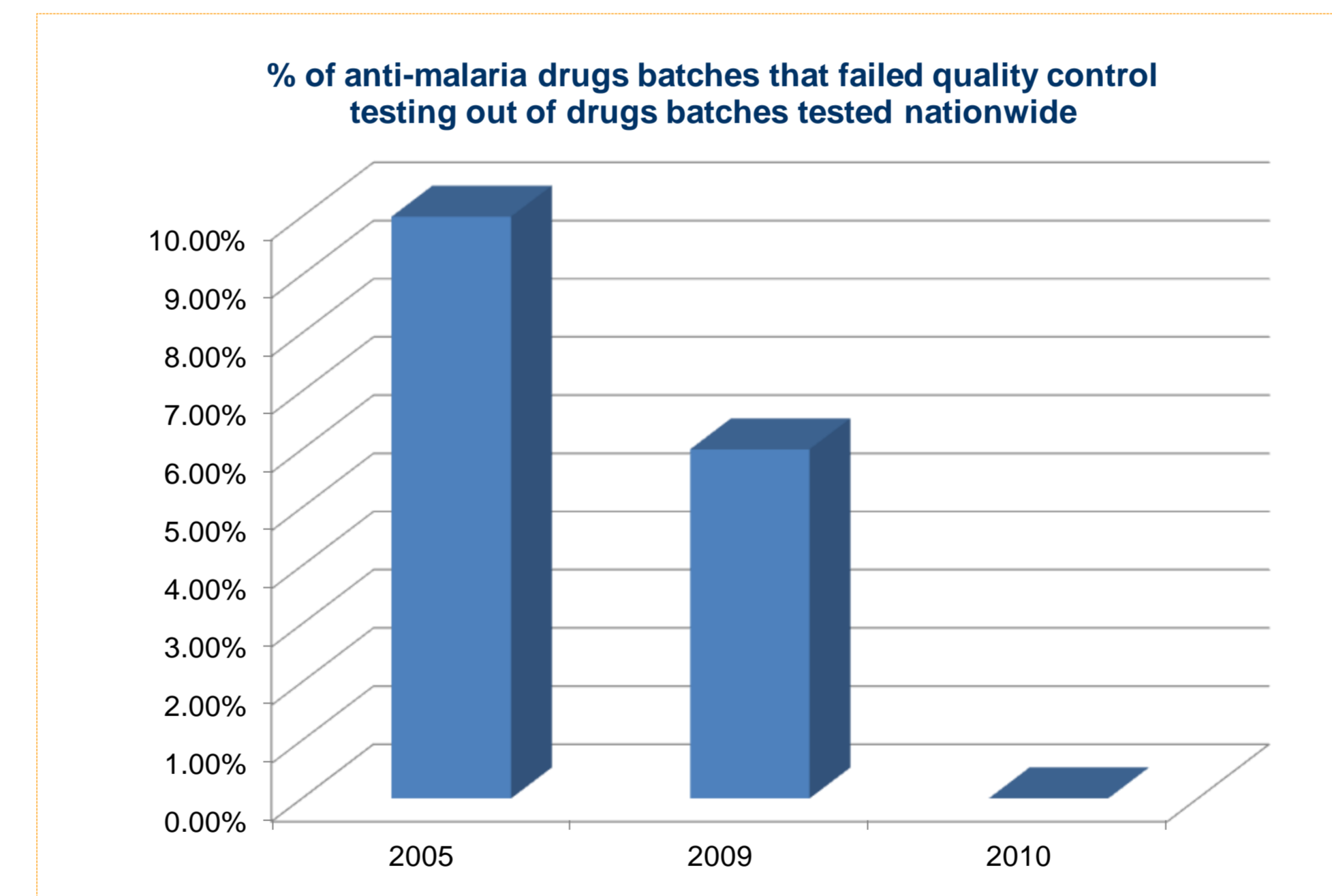
A Drug Inspector visits private pharmacies in Pailin market
Photo: Malaria Consortium



Justice Police inspect drug outlets for artemisinin monotherapy and counterfeit and substandard drugs (above, below and right)
Photo: National Malaria Centre, Ministry of Health, Cambodia



Source: National Malaria Centre, Ministry of Health, Cambodia



Source: National Malaria Centre, Ministry of Health, Cambodia



Inspecting drugs in Pailin, Cambodia



Nuth Tith, a Drug Inspector and member of the Justice Police in Pailin, Cambodia. Photo: Malaria Consortium

Drug Inspector Nuth Tith was nominated as a drug inspector and member of the Justice Police based in Pailin, during the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-funded WHO Containment Project (2009-11) by the Cambodian Ministry of Health in collaboration with Ministry of Interior in late 2009.

“My job is to make sure pharmacies and clinics do not sell counterfeit drugs and to make sure drugs that are sold are of a good quality. Since 2010, I have been making quarterly supervision visits to all pharmacies and clinics to make sure that they are not selling low quality medication. If any company tries to sell illegal drugs in the area, this will also be reported to me. I am also involved in testing drugs; if the quality is poor they will also be removed (from the pharmacy or clinic). I also check drugs are not being sold beyond their expiry date. My role also means ensuring all medication is registered and approved.

“Previously there were many cases of low quality and counterfeit antimalarial drugs in Pailin but this has now improved. Counterfeit drugs are no longer available in pharmacies or clinics and private clinics are not allowed to treat suspected cases of malaria.

“So far we feel it is working very well. There are no antimalarial drugs available on the markets and also malaria patients are not treated at private clinics.”

Further information and sources

Containment of drug resistant malaria on the Thai-Cambodian border (newsletter 2010)
www.who.int/malaria/diagnosis_treatment/arcp/containment_newsletter_issue1.pdf

Containment of drug resistant malaria on the Thai-Cambodian border (Newsletter 2011)
www.who.int/malaria/diagnosis_treatment/arcp/containment_newsletter_issue2.pdf

Important regulatory steps being taken in Cambodia to phase out oral artemisinin-based monotherapies (Presentation 2010)
www.who.int/medicines/areas/quality_safety/regulation_legislation/icdra/PL6-3.pdf