



# STAC

(SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre)

## Newsletter



Vol. XXV, No. 1. Jan. – Apr. 2015

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World TB Day 2015 jointly organized by NTP, Nepal, STAC & Stakeholders on 24th March 2015 in Kathmandu



Interaction Programme with Nursing Students organized by STAC on the occasion of World TB Day 2015



Shree Ajay Devgan, the SAARC Goodwill Ambassador for HIV/AIDS involved in a programme jointly organized by NACO, India and STAC, Nepal in Mumbai on 12th Jan. 2015

STAC Newsletter is a regular publication of SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre, it includes reports of activities, decisions of important meetings of the Centre, news of important activities of National TB and HIV/AIDS Control Programmes of SAARC Member States and recent information on TB and HIV/AIDS.

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## Editorial

### MDR-TB – a challenge for TB control

Anti-tuberculosis (TB) drug resistance is a major public health problem globally and in the SAARC Region. The problem of drug resistant tuberculosis and particularly the MDR-TB is due to the improper use of anti-tuberculosis drug among the drug susceptible TB patients which includes administration of improper treatment regimens and failure to ensure that patients complete the whole course of treatment (WHO). Importantly, the weak TB control program is the area where the drug resistance is observed mostly. Another important aspect is that a patient who has MDR-TB can transmit the same form of infection to other individuals.

Drug-resistant tuberculosis has been reported since the early days of the introduction of chemotherapy. The Drug-Resistance Surveillance launched in 1994 suggested that MDR-TB is not a problem globally (1% in 64 countries/sites surveyed) in comparison to the drug susceptible tuberculosis. However, after series of Drug Resistance Survey on regular basis in many countries and in few of the SAARC Member States, the prevalence of the drug resistance TB is almost in the range of 3 to 20 percent among new cases and previously treated cases respectively and hence identified it as a major public health problem.

The most important issue in tackling the problem of MDR-TB is ensuring proper use of anti-tuberculosis drug among the drug susceptible TB patients. This is the only way forward for preventing the impending epidemics of MDR-TB globally and in the region. Furthermore, roll out of improved diagnostic technologies in parallel with plans for increasing MDR-TB management capacity are crucial issues in tackling MDR-TB.

Therefore, an accurate, rapid detection of TB drug resistance is critical for improving patient care and decreasing TB transmission. Hence, a recently introduced rapid diagnostic technology, a Xpert® MTB/RIF, could be a milestone in the appropriate management of the MDR-TB. It is an automated test that can detect both TB and rifampicin resistance, generally within two hours after starting the test, with minimal hands-on technical time. The World Health Organization (WHO) issued initial recommendations on Xpert® MTB/RIF in early 2011.

However, the matter does not end with the start of the rapid test for MDR-TB, it starts with the challenges that a program is facing with the problems of its cost, environmental limitations (stable and regular electricity, adequate room temperature) and difficulties involved in supply and maintenance. Nevertheless, early diagnosis followed by early treatment of MDR-TB would be the mainstay to control it as is true for drug susceptible tuberculosis.

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**SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION  
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**Message from the Secretary General of SAARC  
on World TB Day, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015**



Today, on the 24th of March 2015, the World Tuberculosis (TB) Day, the SAARC Region joins the global community to commemorate it as SAARC TB Day under the theme - **“Reach the three million; Find, Treat, Cure TB”**. This theme highlights the suffering that TB continues to exert on people, despite the fact that effective diagnostic and treatment measures are available through TB control programs.

According to the WHO 2014 Global TB Report, three million TB cases are missed every year by health systems. In the SAARC region three million people get TB every year, however 1.2 million are missed every year by the health systems. Among those missed are most vulnerable to TB including very poor, malnourished, people living with HIV/AIDS, children and women, migrants, prisoners, refugees and internally displaced persons, minors, the elderly, ethnic minorities, indigenous populations, drug users and homeless persons.

There is a critical need to address the gap of three million and 1.2 million globally and in the region respectively, following the theme on reaching the missed cases. This requires sustained and predictable funding, political engagement and support with the involvement of communities, people affected and civil society.

This World TB Day 2015 will signal a renewed effort to alert Ministers of Health to the global, regional and national TB emergency, emphasizing the unacceptable situation that many cases of TB go undiagnosed, untreated or are not cured. It is a chance to engage with National TB Programme Managers and other stakeholders to improve the quality of existing programmes and the access to care and services.

The post-2015 End TB Strategy aims to end the TB pandemic by 2035. This requires a dramatic change to take place over the next few years in how we fight TB. Our current tools use technology that is old, with treatment regimens that are long, therefore new innovation and tools are hopefully invented in the coming years, to effectively fight the TB pandemic.

The SAARC region, with the estimated annual incidence of three million TB cases, carries 34% of the global burden of TB. Four of the eight Member States in the Region are among the 22 high burden countries with the highest burden of TB, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

To this end, the SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre should continue to work with National TB Programmes of SAARC Member States and all other stakeholders to ensure maximum coverage with appropriate strategies to fight TB. This demands that Governments employ innovative partnerships with all including the civil society and the private sector.

SAARC Member States are highly committed to tackling the major public health problems including TB and HIV/AIDS. The commitment is both at the national & regional level. The epidemiology of TB & HIV/AIDS is such that sustained effort is required for a long period in order to control these problems. Thus, the establishment of SAARC TB & HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) is one of the historic milestones to address all these challenges in South Asia. The STAC works with the mission to support the efforts of National TB and HIV/AIDS Control Programmes through evidence based policy guidance, coordination and technical support & with a goal to minimize the mortality and morbidity due to TB and HIV/AIDS in the region and to minimize the transmission of both infections until TB and HIV/AIDS cease to be major public health problems in the SAARC Region.

In commemorating this day, I would like to call on national authorities and development partners to strengthen TB prevention and control initiatives in the Region to stem the tide of this epidemic. I also call for intensified global/regional solidarity to ensure that all people are free from fear of tuberculosis and its devastating effects.

  
Arjun B. Thapa

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# Report on Activities

## Programme of the SAARC Goodwill Ambassador for HIV/AIDS

Shree Ajay Devgan, SAARC Goodwill Ambassador for HIV/AIDS was involved in a programme jointly organized by NACO, India and STAC, Nepal in Mumbai on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2015. He was attending a special programme on the occasion of National Youth Day and interacted with people affected by HIV/AIDS with a plea to the public to remove the social stigma and discrimination against People living with HIV/AIDS.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC), Nepal was present in the programme and highlighted the support provided by the SAARC Goodwill Ambassadors for spreading awareness in the general people. Dr. Verma congratulated Shree Devgan for his appointment as SAARC Goodwill Ambassadors for HIV/AIDS and offered souvenir and wished for his grand success in the role of goodwill ambassador in this region. Dr. Verma was accompanied by Dr.



*(Dr. S. C. Verma, Director, STAC offering souvenir to Shree Ajay Devgan, SAARC Goodwill Ambassador for HIV/AIDS)*

Ghanshyam Kumar Bhatta, Research Officer from STAC.

Shree Devgan expressed his willingness to help spread awareness about the critical issue of HIV/AIDS and its prevention in the SAARC Member States. Talking about the cause, Shree Devgan said "I feel the only cure for HIV/AIDS is prevention, and that can only happen if there

is proper awareness. People are ignorant about HIV/AIDS; many feel that it can be transmitted through touch or that HIV-positive people can't live a normal life, which is not true... talking about the basics, can help people." He expressed his willingness to visit Nepal and Maldives as a SAARC Goodwill Ambassador for HIV/AIDS in near future.

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## Commemoration of World TB Day/SAARC TB Day 2015

World TB Day/SAARC TB Day is commemorated on 24<sup>th</sup> March every year all over the world. It is designed to build advocacy to policy makers to create public awareness on TB control and prevention and to the Government for reiterating their political commitments to support TB control programme as a National public health priority programme.

It commemorates the day in 1882, when Dr. Robert Koch astounded the scientific community by announcing the discovery of the cause of



*(Dr. S. C. Verma, Director, STAC addressing the participants of interaction programme)*

tuberculosis, the TB bacillus. Dr. Koch's discovery opened the way towards diagnosing and curing TB.

The theme of the Day was **“Reach the three million”, A TB test, treatment and cure for all.** The NTP is required to ensure the access and coverage for all to reach the three million unreached. Among these three million, 1.2 million are in SAARC Region.

It is believed that no one should be left behind in the fight against TB. This World TB Day, is called for a global/regional effort to find, treat and cure the missing patients and accelerate progress towards zero TB deaths, infections, suffering and stigma. To reach the three million, it is necessary to aggressively scale up TB programmes and ensure access and coverage for all, especially for the most vulnerable groups and in areas most highly affected by the diseases - the TB 'hotspots'.

Considering the situation of TB, the 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Governing Board of STAC recommended to commemorate the World TB Day along with SAARC TB Day by organizing advocacy and awareness programme on TB. Accordingly, STAC had organized following programmes as an advocacy & awareness programme to generate the level of awareness on TB and its prevention.

### **Interaction Programme with Nursing Students**

Students of the Nursing Colleges can play an important role in the National efforts to manage TB patients and save lives. They are in a unique position to reach various levels of health care system. They are the potential new generation of health professionals whose knowledge

about the prioritized communicable diseases like tuberculosis have been updated.

The role of Nurses in National disease control cannot be denied. However, their active participation in National TB Control Programmes has so far been inadequate.

On this occasion a one day **“Interaction Programme on Tuberculosis and its Preventive Strategy”** was organized by STAC at Thimi on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015 with the following **objectives**:

- to create public awareness on tuberculosis control,
- to discuss the role of Nursing Colleges on spreading of awareness, building capacity in service delivery specially in TB control programme,
- to disseminate updated information on TB and its control and
- to seek coordination and cooperation for control efforts on TB

### **Participation**

Total 80 students and 5 teachers participated in the programme as participants from both colleges, Iwamura College of Health Science, Bhaktapur, and Chakrabarti Habi Education Academy, Thimi, Bhaktapur.

### **Technical Programme**

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC, welcomed dignitaries, participants and resource persons and highlighted objectives of the commemoration of World TB day along with SAARC TB Day. He accorded high priority on Public Private Mix programme in TB control. Dr. Verma highlighted the ways how to reach to un-reached and marginalized population. He thanked to the officials from the different organizations and students/teachers for participating in the programme.

Dr. Adwin Ceniza Salvador from WHO, Country Office, Nepal, presented paper on the TB control Programme at the global level. He highlighted the global burden, achievements and efforts for stopping the tuberculosis.

Dr. Ghanshyam Kumar Bhatta, Research Officer, STAC highlighted the role of SAARC TB & HIV/AIDS Centre & SAARC Regional burden of TB.

Dr. Bikash Lamichhane, Director, NTP, Nepal presented a paper on National Scenario of Tuberculosis in Nepal and efforts being made by NTP Nepal.

Dr. Dipendra Raman Singh, Director, National Centre for AIDS & STD



Control Nepal, urged to strengthen the collaboration between TB and HIV/AIDS Control Programmes.

On behalf of the participating Colleges, Ms. Nisha Kiran Bhandari, Teacher from Chakrabarti Habi Health & Science College & Ms. Sanu Maya Khadka, Principal from Dr. Iwamura College of Health Science, Bhaktapur expressed their views. They requested to continue this type of programme in future.

Dr. Raj Kumar Mahato, Act. Director, NPHL Kathmandu explained the different methods of diagnosis of tuberculosis in Nepal.

Guest of Honour Ms. Najwa Fathimath, Director, Social Affairs, SAARC Secretariat, appreciated the programme organized by STAC and quoted the message of His Excellency, Secretary General of SAARC.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director STAC awarded the souvenir to the representatives of participating colleges. He also delivered the vote of thanks and closing remarks.

#### Outcomes

Participants were made aware of issues in relation to TB and its control in Nepal as well as in the Globe/

SAARC region. The participating nursing students and teachers showed their commitment to provide co-ordination and cooperation for spreading awareness regarding TB to the general people and they updated the role of nursing students for the control of TB.

#### Preparation of Awareness Materials

T-shirt printed with slogan of World TB Day was prepared and distributed in the SAARC Member States and eye-catching hoarding board was placed at the entrance of STAC office with global and regional slogans.

## Participation in World TB Day Programme



(Audience and dignitaries attending World TB Day programme held in Kathmandu on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015)

World TB Day 2015 was organized jointly by NTP Nepal, STAC and stakeholders at Nepal Academy, Kathmandu on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015. The programme was graced by the Hon'ble Dr. Yagya Bahadur Karki, Member, National Planning Commission, Nepal as the Chief Guest.

The programme was chaired by Mr. Shanta Bahadur Shrestha, Secretary, Ministry of Health and Population Government of Nepal.

His Excellency, Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Secretary General, SAARC, attended the programme.

Dr. Senendra Raj Upreti, the Director General, Department of Health Services, delivered welcome speech.

His Excellency Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Secretary General, SAARC issued a Message on the occasion of World TB Day/SAARC TB Day 2015. The message was conveyed to National TB Control Programmes of SAARC Member States to publish in National daily Newspapers. The message was published by NTP, Nepal in the Gorkhapatra Daily, a National daily newspaper of Nepal on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC presented a paper on "Achievement of SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre".

The Chief Guest distributed the NTP Dixaxa & Rana Samundra Awards to the contributors to NTP Nepal for their remarkable contribution.

The programme was attended by the representative of JICA, Nepal, NATA, USAID, large number of people from I/NGOs and journalists from electronic and print media.

#### Displaying of Flex and Banners

STAC prepared number of flex/banners with information about STAC and its activities for TB and HIV/AIDS control in SAARC Member States, which were displayed at the main venue of World TB Day function. The Chief Guest and all visitors observed the information displayed on the flex and acquired different information regarding control of TB in the SAARC Region.

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## Commemoration of World TB Day 2015 in SAARC Member States

World TB Day 2015 has been commemorated in all SAARC Member States by organizing different activities. The news regarding the commemoration of world TB day is published on different websites. Press releases, speeches, dramas, rally, walkathon, seminars, meeting etc. have been organized at provincial/district level, national or regional level as per their need and importance. Every activity on this day has been given emphasis on theme/slogan of the day.

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## Brief News

- Mr. Ramesh Prasad Khanal, Joint Secretary, and Ms. Rita Dhital, Under Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal visited SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre, Thimi on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015. The discussion was held with the Director, STAC on the development of the Centre, its activities and future programmes. They observed the functioning, infrastructure and facilities of the Centre.



*(Discussion between dignitaries from MoFA, Govt. of Nepal and Director, STAC)*

- At the invitation of the Government of India, Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, Dr. Ghanshyam Kumar Bhatta, Research Officer and Dr. Gajananda Prakash Bhandari, Epidemiologist of the SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) participated in the following meetings organized from 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015 in New Delhi, India.



*(Participation of Dr. G. P. Bhandari, Epidemiologist, STAC in DR-TB Workshop organized by WHO/SEARO in Bangkok)*

- i. Fifth Meeting of the SAARC Technical Committee on Health and Population Activities,
- ii. Seventh Meeting of the SAARC Expert Group on HIV/AIDS,
- iii. Meeting of the Senior Officials.



- Director, STAC also participated in the Fifth Meeting of SAARC Health Ministers, New Delhi, India on 8 April, 2015

The meeting deliberated and provided guidance and a roadmap for strengthening collaboration among SAARC countries on a number of issues and challenges faced by these countries. Some of the prominent health issues discussed which included prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, disease surveillance network, health infrastructure, human resources for health, immunization for vaccine preventable diseases, HIV/AIDS, mental health, improving access to medicines and anti-microbial resistance etc.

- Director, STAC was involved in a Joint Monitoring Mission (JMM) to review the India's Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP) conducted by the Government of India, World Health Organization (WHO) and other technical & donor partners from 10<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2015. STAC is always there to support the international review of the NTPs in Member States upon their request.
- Dr. Gajananda Prakash Bhandari, Epidemiologist, STAC participated in the Regional Workshop on combating Drug Resistant TB, held in Bangkok, from 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2015 organized by WHO/SEARO.

### Support for Nepal Earthquake 2015

STAC staff donated their one-day salary to the victims of the recent earthquake of Nepal. Amount has been deposited into the bank account of **Prime Minister Disaster Relief Fund, Nepal**.