STAC Newsletter is a regular publication of SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre, it includes reports on 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, HIV/AIDS and their control.

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Editorial

The SAARC Region is getting three million new TB cases and the deaths of almost half a million people each year. However, the case detection rate is still 58% in the region and 1.2 million people are out of reach from the diagnostic and treatment services.

Hence, the SAARC TB Day, celebrated on the occasion of World TB Day, each year on the 24th of March is an occasion to mobilize political and social commitment to further progress towards eliminating TB as a public health burden. On the occasion, the SAARC call on all member states to continue their national efforts and commitment to find, treat and cure all people with TB and accelerate progress towards the bold goal of ending TB by 2035.

The theme of this year's world TB day is "Reach the 3 Million: Reach, Treat, Cure Everyone" which is to reach 1.2 million unreached in the SAARC region. As per the WHO analysis, to address the issue, there is a critical need to address weaknesses in countries' health systems, and need sustained and predictable funding, political engagement and support. The countries also need to step up their domestic investments in TB in a cost efficient manner - in prioritized interventions that work and show impact. There is also a need for the communities, people affected and civil society in the driving seat.

This year's campaign also provides a platform to highlight the urgent need to fill the current funding gap of US$ 2 billion per year for TB interventions and the immediate need to fill the US$ 1.39 billion annual gap for research and development. The importance of eliminating access barriers to all recommended TB diagnostics and drugs and addressing TB and MDR-TB as global health security threats will also be highlighted, along with the fact that TB needs to be everyone's concern and the urgent need to therefore involve everyone in the fight against the disease.
Report on Activities

The 24th Meeting of the Governing Board of STAC

Twenty-fourth Meeting of the Governing Board of SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) was held on 23rd and 24th September 2014 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Governing Board Members Mr. Md. Abdur Rahim from Bangladesh, Dr. Dorji Wangchuk from Bhutan, Dr. Neeraj Dhingra from India, Dr. Abdul Azeez Yoosuf from Maldives, Dr. Bimal Prasad Dhakal & Mr. Mani Ratna Sharma from Nepal, Dr. K. N. Gamini Seneviratne from Sri Lanka, Ms. Fathimath Najwa, representative of SAARC Secretary General participated in the Meeting. The Meeting was opened by the Chairperson of the Governing Board of STAC, Dr. K. N. Gamini Seneviratne.

Director, STAC welcomed members of the Board in the meeting. Ms. Fathimath Najwa, representative of SAARC Secretariat highlighted the role & responsibilities of STAC and urged the need to further strengthen the Centre in spite of constraints & challenges. She also appealed for the co-operation and support of Board Members and National Focal Points which are very crucial to ensure effective implementation of the programmes of the Centre.

The Board reviewed the current year’s activities and recommended the Programmes & Budget of the Centre for 2015.

Recommended Programmes:

- SAARC Regional Training on Risk Communication on DR-TB and Parents to Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS
- SAARC Regional TOT on Line Probe Assay and GenXpert for diagnosis of patients at risk of MDR-TB
- SAARC Regional Parliamentarian’s Meet on MDG - 6 (TB and HIV/AIDS)
- Building SAARC Regional Capacity on Epidemiology and Surveillance on DR-TB
- SAARC Regional Meeting of Programme Managers on TB and HIV/AIDS Control and Heads of National TB Reference Laboratories
- Visit of SAARC Goodwill Ambassadors, in Pakistan/Maldives and Sri Lanka/Nepal
- Conferment of SAARC Award on Tuberculosis – 2015
- Commemoration of World TB Day
- Commemoration of World AIDS Day
- Celebration of SAARC Charter Day
- Regional Grant on Integrated Biological and Behavioral Survey (IBBS) of Most at Risk Population at HIV/AIDS in Maldives, research on support to diagnostic and management service in difficult to reach population in Afghanistan and Bhutan/Nepal and research grant to support NTP & NACP in priority areas.
- Research findings will be shared by participating in different conferences, meetings, workshops, seminars etc. organized in SAARC Member States as well as abroad.
- Technical support in control of TB and prevention of HIV/AIDS in Member States will be provided along with the support in Quality Control of TB Lab activities.
- Newsletters, Journals, Reports and other informative publications will be published for the dissemination of the technical as well as awareness information and new findings in different aspects of the TB and HIV/AIDS.
- STAC Library will be strengthened to act as a SAARC Resource Centre for TB and HIV/AIDS. STAC website will be updated for more users friendly and compatible for all browsers by which researchers, students, and people who are working for TB and HIV/AIDS will be more benefited.
SAARC Regional Training on Leadership & Strategic Management for TB & HIV/AIDS Control Programmes, Maldives


Dr. Aishath Rameela, Hon’ble Minister of State for Health, Ministry of Health, Government of Maldives graced the occasion as a Chief Guest in the opening ceremony. In her address she welcomed the participants and expressed appreciation for the work being done by the SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre for the control of TB and HIV/AIDS in the region. She also stated the global burden of TB and HIV/AIDS in the region and emphasized that this is the timely opportunity to train a team of managers on leadership and managerial skills to manage the control activities. She thanked the STAC officials for organizing such useful training and wished success.

Hon’ble Deputy Ministers of Health and Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Maldives attended the inaugural session of the Training Programme.

Ms. Maimoona Aboobakuru, Director, Health Protection Agency (HPA), Government of Maldives delivered introductory remarks in the inaugural session. She expressed her appreciation about the progress of STAC and also explained the need of training for quality leadership and management in National TB and HIV/AIDS Control Programmes in Member States.

Dr. Gajananda Prakash Bhandari, Epidemiologist, STAC, delivered the welcome remarks. He expressed gratitude to the Government of Maldives for warm hospitality and excellent arrangement made for the programme. He conveyed the message of greetings and the best wishes from SAARC Secretary-General for the success of this Training and thanked all for sparing their valuable time for this programme.

Dr. B. B. Rewari, NPO (HIV/AIDS), WHO, India delivered his remarks. He anticipated that the training will certainly be fruitful to enhance the leadership and management knowledge skills of the programme managers working for TB and HIV/AIDS control in the region.

The programme was concluded on 10th Nov. 2014. A closing session was organized where Hon’ble Minister Mr. Mohamed Nazim, Ministry of Health, Government of Maldives graced the programme as a Chief Guest and delivered closing remarks. In his remarks, he stated the importance of training in both NTP and NACP by building up the confidence of officials working with high profile managers and the importance of coordination between them in accomplishing common goals of the health sector. He highlighted that the SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre is playing vital role to reduce the burden of TB and HIV/AIDS in the Region in spite of facing many challenges to conduct the activities.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC, expressed a warm welcome to all the delegates and dignitaries assembled for the closing session of the training Programme. He thanked to the National Programme Managers of NTPs and NACPs of SAARC Member states for the nomination the participants.

Ms. Meena Kumari Dhakal, Sr. PA, SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre, Nepal delivered vote of thanks.

The training was attended by the participants from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka and was facilitated by the experts from STAC, WHO, IIHMR.
SAARC Regional Meeting of the Programme Managers of National TB and National HIV/AIDS Control Programmes of Member States, Bhutan

SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC), Nepal, in association with the NTP and NACP, Department of Public Health, Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan, jointly organized a “SAARC Meeting of the Programme Managers of National TB and HIV/AIDS Control Programmes” in Thimphu, Bhutan from 5th to 6th December 2014.

Dr. Dorji Wangchuk, Hon’ble Secretary, Ministry of Health, Bhutan graced the inaugural session as the Chief Guest, Mr. Tanding Dorji, Officiating Director General, Department of Public Health and Dr. Karma Lhazeen, Chief Programme Officer, CDD, Ministry of Health, attended the session as Guests.

The objectives of the meeting were:
- to discuss/share the achievements, experience, innovations and challenges in NTPs and NACPs in the SAARC Member States,
- to discuss/share of the progress on MDG in NTPs and NACPs in the SAARC Member States,
- to discuss on policy/strategy issues on NTPs and NACPs in the SAARC Member States and
- to discuss on implementation of the recommendations of SAARC Regional Programme Managers’ Meeting held in the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

The meeting was participated by the National Programme Managers from Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC delivered welcome address and expressed his gratitude to the Ministry of Health, Government of Bhutan for accepting the request of STAC to organize the meeting in Thimphu. He thanked SAARC Member States for sending the Programme Managers of National TB and HIV/AIDS Control Programmes to participate in the meeting. He conveyed the message of Secretary General of the SAARC for successful completion of the meeting. Dr. Verma highlighted the importance of strong collaboration to tackle the problem of TB and HIV/AIDS in the region and to achieve the stated goal of zero infection, discrimination and death.

Dr. Dorji Wangchuk, Hon’ble Secretary, Ministry of Health, Bhutan, welcomed all delegates from member states by delivering welcome address. He mentioned that the two diseases (TB and HIV) are disease of poverty and the region is hardly hit by these two factors and expected that the shifting economy of the region may support to address the burden of disease. He remembered his participation in the governing board meeting of STAC and urged to implement the recommendations. At the conclusion he wished successful completion of the meeting with fruitful recommendations.

Dr. Gajananda Prakash Bhandari, Epidemiologist, STAC delivered vote of thanks. He expressed profound gratitude to the Royal Government of Bhutan for accepting the request of STAC to organize this programme managers meeting in Thimphu. He thanked Dr. Dorji Wangchuk, Hon’ble Secretary, Ministry of Health for his support and cooperation and dignitaries from Ministry of Health and Department of Public Health. He also thanked Mr. Chewang Rinzin, Deputy Chief Programme Officer, National TB Control Programme, Department of Public Health, Ministry of Health, Bhutan and his team for their cooperation and management.

The meeting concluded with 5 unanimous recommendations after reviewing the recommendations of the previous meetings held in Maldives and Sri Lanka.
Celebration of the 30th SAARC Charter Day

On the auspicious occasion of 30th SAARC Charter Day, SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) organized a fine art competition & exhibition programme at Centre's premises on 8th December 2014. Thirty five students from Nepal Fine Art Campus, Kathmandu took part in the programme.

The objective of the programme was to celebrate the SAARC Charter Day for promotion and advocacy of the SAARC.

Fine arts artists students were given four topics related to themes of 17th and 18th SAARC Summits; such as Building Bridges and Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity, similarly, slogans of World TB Day & World AIDS Day such as – Reach the three million – A TB Test, Treatment and Cure for All and Getting to Zero - Zero New HIV Infection, Zero Discrimination & Zero AIDS related Deaths. The artist students portrayed the slogans related to SAARC and TB & HIV/AIDS in the canvas.

The fine arts prepared by the students were displayed under the different topics and observed by the Hon’ble Minister, dignitaries, guests, officials and staff of the Centre. Hon'ble Minister appreciated the arts and expressed his views that the arts prepared by the students are well enough to highlight the aim and objectives of the SAARC and themes of the World TB Day & World AIDS Day. Among all, 4 (one from each topic) were selected as the best arts by the experts.

A special programme was organized to celebrate the 30th SAARC Charter Day at Thimi, Bhaktapur, Nepal on 8th Dec. 2014. Hon'ble Minister Mr. Khag Raj Adhikari, Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), Government of Nepal graced the programme as a Chief Guest, Dr. Shanta Bahadur Shrestha, Secretary, MoHP chaired the programme Ms. Fathimath Najwa, Director, Social Division, SAARC Secretariat attended the programme as the Guest of Honour. Dr. Bikash Lamichhane, Director, National TB Centre, Dr. Dipendra Raman Singh, Director, National Centre for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC) and Mr. Bipin Ghimire, Campus Chief, Nepal Fine Art Campus, Kathmandu also attended the programme.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC welcomed the guests, dignitaries and participants in the programme. He highlighted the objectives of the celebration of SAARC Charter Day, progress of the SAARC and achievement of the STAC.
The Chief Guest awarded certificates to the participants and released the book "SAARC Regional Strategy for Control/Elimination of Tuberculosis" prepared by STAC to implement the activities during 2013 to 2017 in the region.

On behalf of the students/ participants Mr. Pradeep Saud gave his remarks and expressed his views.

On behalf of teachers Mr. Lek Bahadur Tamang gave his remarks and thanked on behalf of Nepal Fine Art Campus for inviting them to participate in this special occasion.

His Excellency Secretary General's remark was quoted by Ms. Fathimath Najwa. In the remarks; His Excellency expressed thanks to STAC for organizing such an important programme to advocate SAARC on the auspicious occasion of SAARC Charter Day. H.E. expressed his good wishes to the people of all member states of SAARC and importance of the SAARC charter day.

Hon'ble Minister gave his remarks and highlighted the importance of the SAARC and its Charter. He congratulated the participants for their efforts to highlight the objective of the SAARC and providing different messages related to TB and HIV/AIDS through the eye pleasant fine arts. He thanked SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre for celebrating the SAARC Charter Day by organizing important programme.

Chairperson, Secretary for Health and Population, Government of Nepal highlighted on the SAARC, its importance in the region. He expressed his assurance on SAARC Supra-national Laboratory for TB and HIV/AIDS which is going to be established at STAC very soon.

Selected arts under four different themes and slogans

- (Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity)
- (Building Bridges)
- (Reach the three million – A TB Test)
- (Getting to Zero - Zero New HIV Infection, Zero Discrimination & Zero AIDS related Deaths)

(Participant students of the Nepal Fine Arts Campus, Kathmandu)
SAARC Regional Training on MDR & XDR TB on Clinical and Programmatic Management, Bangladesh

SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC), Nepal organized a five-day training on MDR & XDR TB on Clinical and Programmatic Management in Dhaka from 11th to 15th December 2014. The programme was organized by STAC in collaboration with National TB Control Programme, Government of Bangladesh.

Dr. Md. Ahmed Hussain Khan, Deputy Director, MBDC as well as Programme Manager of National Tuberculosis Control Programme, Government of Bangladesh chaired the opening session of the programme. Professor Dr. Deen Mohd. Noorul Huq, Directorate General of Health Services, Government of Bangladesh graced the session as a Chief Guest.

In his address the Chief Guest thanked STAC for organizing this important training in Bangladesh. He expressed his happiness on significant progress made by the SAARC Member States towards the TB related MDGs. The estimates of incidence, prevalence and mortality of all forms of TB continue to show a downward trend, however, MDR-TB and XDR-TB is still remaining as a big challenge.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC welcomed all participants, resource persons and guests by delivering welcome address. He thanked to Professor Dr. Deen Mohd Noorul Huq for his presence in opening session as the Chief Guest. He also thanked the Director, MBDC & Manager National TB Control Programme for warm hospitality extended and excellent arrangements made for this training.

Dr. Md. Ahmed Hussain Khan delivered his concluding remarks as a chairperson of the session. He elaborated the importance of the training related to very important issues of TB control programme, i.e. MDR & XDR TB. The objectives of the training were to update global/regional information on MDR/XDR TB and principle of MDR TB in NTP by discussing evidence based management of MDR/XDR TB and update recent advances in rapid diagnosis of Drug Resistance and to introduce programmatic Management of MDR- XDR TB in resource limited settings.

The training was attended by the participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka and facilitated by the resource persons, Dr. Md. Quamrul Islam, Director, MBDC, Bangladesh, Dr. Ahmed Hussain Khan, PM, NTP, Bangladesh, Dr. Asif Mujtaba Mahmud, Associate Professor, Respiratory Medicine, IEDCR, Dr. MA Hamid Salim, MDR TB/GF Advisor, NTP Bangladesh, Dr. Md. Wahiduzzaman Akhanda, PDMT Co-ordinator, Dhaka, Dr. S.M. Mostofa Kamal, Associate Professor, NIDCH, Dr. Md. Mojibur Rahman, Bangladesh and Dr. Sabera Sultana, Bangladesh.

Ms. Roxana Quader, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh graced the closing session as a Chief Guest. She distributed the certificates to the participants and facilitators and thanked STAC for organizing this training in Dhaka. The closing session was chaired by Dr. Md. Quamrul Islam, Director MBDC & Line Director, TB & Leprosy.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC, thanked the Ministry of Health, NTP and team for their hard works and excellent arrangements of the training. He expressed gratitude to Government of Bangladesh for continued support for activities of STAC.

The chairperson of the closing session Dr. Md. Quamrul Islam, Director MBDC & Line Director, TB & Leprosy delivered remarks. Dr. Ahmed Hussain Khan, Programme Manager, NTP Bangladesh also gave his remarks. Dr. Gajananda Prakash Bhandari, Epidemiologist, STAC delivered the vote of Thanks.
Brief News

Visit of Hon’ble Minister Mr. Khag Raj Adhikari, Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal

Hon’ble Mr. Khag Raj Adhikari, Minister for Health and Population, Government of Nepal visited SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC), Thimi, Bhaktapur on 24th November 2014. Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director along with staff of the Centre welcomed Hon’ble Minister. During the visit an introductory meeting was organized in honour of the Minister where introduction of staff along with the introduction of the Centre & status of TB & HIV/AIDS in the SAARC Region was presented.

Hon’ble Minister observed the functioning of the Centre, its infrastructure and available facilities. He also acquired the information about staff strength.

Participation in 48th Session of SAARC Programming Committee

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director and Dr. Gajananda P. Bhandari, Epidemiologist, STAC participated in The 48th Session of SAARC Programming Committee organized in Kathmandu from 26th to 28th October 2014. The meeting reviewed the implementation of the recommendations of The 45th Session of the Programming Committee Meeting (Maldives Feb. 2014) and considered the Reports of the Governing Boards of the SAARC Regional Centres along with the other matters.

The 45th Union world conference on lung health in Barcelona, Spain

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre attended the 45th Union world conference on lung health in Barcelona, Spain on 28 October to 1 Nov. 2014. The conference was attended by over 3 thousand delegates from all over the world.

This Union conference created the broadest international impact with the first-ever Global TB Summit culminating in the Barcelona Declaration on Tuberculosis. Media coverage was focused on key issues, such as a shortened regimen for MDR-TB and the looming TB-diabetes epidemic. The need for all stakeholders to have a strong role in public health was highlighted throughout the week in keeping with the theme of "Community solution for the next generation". During the conference, Dr. Verma had an opportunity to discuss with the National Programme Managers of TB control Programmes of the SAARC Member States.
Participation in the Regional Meeting of the Programme Managers

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC participated in regional meeting of NTP Managers and Partners organized by WHO/SEARO in New Delhi, India on 10th to 14th Nov. 2014. On 3rd day Dr. Verma performed his role as Moderator in session "Presentation of group work and plenary discussion"

The general objective of the meeting was to organize consultation involving the NTPs, development partners, bilateral organizations, donors, civil society and other stakeholders in the development of country targets and relevant strategies in line with the new global post 2015 strategy and strengthen the implementation of TB control interventions in the Region.

STAC is a collaborating Centre of WHO/SEARO since 2000 when MoU was signed on 23rd August 2000 between two organizations to work collectively for TB and HIV/AIDS. It was an opportunity for NTP Managers and collaborative partners to renew contact with existing partners meet to discuss issues with partners, share experiences and build on the discussions for future actions in the respective countries specifically the Global TB Strategy – post 2015.

Meeting of STAC Director with Permanent Secretary, MoFA, Government of Maldives

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC, met Mr. Hassan Shifau, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Maldives during the training programme and discussed on the current status of TB and HIV/AIDS in the SAARC Member States.

Meeting of STAC, Director with Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh

During the SAARC Training on MDR & XDR TB on Clinical and Programmatic Management held from 11th to 15th December 2014 in Dhaka, the delegates from SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre visited the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh. Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC briefed the introduction and activities of STAC to Ms. Roxana Quader, Additional Secretary. Dr. Verma expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh for continued cooperation and support to STAC. Ms. Roxana Quader appreciated the efforts of the STAC for control of TB and HIV/AIDS in the SAARC Region.

Meeting of Director, STAC, with Programme Manager, NACP, Bangladesh

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC and National Programme Manager, HIV/AIDS Control Programme, Government of Bangladesh discussed on the situation of HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh and Programme of SAARC Goodwill Ambassador for HIV/AIDS, Ms. Runa Laila for Country level Sensitization, Advocacy and Social Mobilization on HIV/AIDS and TB in Bangladesh.

World AIDS Day 2014

A hoarding board banner has been prepared and displayed at the premises of STAC at Thimi, Bhaktapur, Nepal for purpose of advocacy & awareness on prevention of HIV/AIDS.

STAC also prepared badges as awareness materials for distribution in HIV/AIDS programmes to be held in SAARC Member States.

(Hoarding Board placed at the premises of STAC)

(Badges for distribution on World AIDS Day)