In this issue

Editorial Page No.

Messages of H. E. Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Secretary General of SAARC:
- On the occasion of World AIDS Day 2015
- On the auspicious occasion of the Thirty-First SAARC Charter Day

Report on Activities:
- SAARC Regional Meeting of Programme Managers of NTPs, NACPs and Heads of NTRLs ———— 1
- SAARC Prize on Tuberculosis—2015, awarded ———— 2
- Commemoration of World AIDS Day 2015 ———— 3
- Celebration of 31st SAARC Charter Day ———— 4
- Twenty – Fifth Meeting of the Governing Board Meeting ———— 5

Brief News:
- E-Training Module for HIV TB ———— 7
- Observation of STAC by the Members of SAARC PC Meeting ———— 7

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.

For more information and correspondence, please contact
SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre, Thimi, Bhaktapur, G. P.O.Box No. 9517, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 00977-1-6632601, 6632477, 6631048, Fax: 00977-1-6634379, E-mail: saarctb@mos.com.np Website: www.saarctb.org
Editorial

Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030

The international community has committed to ending the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030 – an ambitious target of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015. Interim targets have been established for 2020 in which, what countries need to do and what WHO will do has been described. If implemented, these fast-track actions by countries and by WHO will accelerate and intensify the HIV response in order for the “end of AIDS” to become a reality.

Reducing new HIV infections by 75% by the end of 2020 as compared with 2010 will require major reductions in vulnerability and risk behaviour, new approaches to delivering effective prevention interventions to those who need them, and new prevention technologies.

Some populations are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection because of their high exposure to HIV and/or their inability to avoid risks or to use effective HIV prevention interventions. As mentioned, factors that increase HIV vulnerability in certain locations and populations, notably among adolescents (10–19 years) and young people (20–24 years) continue to be vulnerable, both socially and economically, to HIV infection despite efforts to date. This is particularly true for adolescents — especially girls — who live in settings with a generalized HIV epidemic or who are members of key populations at higher risk for HIV acquisition or transmission through sexual transmission and injecting drug use. Thus, we need to enhance the accessibility to treatment and care for adolescents with HIV. Following HIV Testing and Counseling (HTC), there are poor linkages to and retention in care for most populations, and ART coverage rates for adolescents are lower than for other age groups.

In order to halt the morbidity and mortality, all SAARC leaders have shown their commitment and recognized HIV/AIDS as major threat to the region’s overall development including economic transformation. At the same time SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) in collaboration with Member States and UN agencies has scaled up the AIDS responses over the decade and have made notable progress across South Asia in line with the SAARC regional Strategy on HIV/AIDS with the vision to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and to remove the social determinants prevailing in the region in different ways.
MESSAGE
WORLD AIDS DAY, 1 DECEMBER 2015

World AIDS Day is observed globally every year on 1 December to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS. "Getting to Zero" is the theme of this year’s World AIDS Day, which aims for "Zero new HIV infections. Zero discrimination. Zero AIDS-related deaths."

Achieving the target set by UNAIDS for ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 is possible by closing the gap between people who have access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services and people who are left behind. Closing the gap means empowering and enabling all the people, everywhere, to access the services they need. By closing the HIV testing gap, people who are unaware of their HIV-positive status can begin to get support; by closing the treatment gap, people living with HIV will have more access to life-saving medicine; by closing the gap in access to medicines for children, all the children living with HIV will be able to access treatment; and by closing the access gap, all the people can be included as a part of the solution.

In line with its Charter objectives, SAARC remains committed to “promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life.” Accordingly, at their successive SAARC Summits, our Leaders have recognized HIV/AIDS as a major threat to the region’s economic transformation. At the Twelfth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad in January 2004, our Leaders committed themselves to reduce the spread of the epidemic in the region and to enable access to affordable prevention and treatment services to combat HIV/AIDS, TB and other infectious diseases by strengthening the SAARC TB & HIV/AIDS Centre in Nepal.

South Asia has a low HIV prevalence of less than one percent. The HIV virus has shown a declining trend in some of the countries of the region and there has been notable progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). On a more positive note, all the SAARC Member States have developed their strategic plans to combat HIV/TB. In addition, the Member States have also increased access to and coverage of life-saving treatment, reduced HIV infection, and accelerated efforts to eliminate the risk for vulnerable populations.

As we observe the World AIDS Day today, I call for intensified global and regional actions to halt, control and prevent the HIV/AIDS epidemic across the SAARC region by 2030.

Kathmandu, Nepal.

(Secretary-General of SAARC)
MESSAGE
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE THIRTY-FIRST SAARC CHARTER DAY

8 December this year marks the Thirty-first Charter Day of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

SAARC came into being at the first-ever SAARC Summit held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in December 1985, following a series of brainstorming sessions among the Senior Officials, Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Ministers of its Member States. As defined in its Charter, the principal objectives of the Association are to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life through accelerated economic cooperation, social progress and cultural development in the region.

SAARC is a regional organization born out of the consciousness that in an increasingly interdependent world, the objectives of peace, freedom, social justice and economic prosperity are best achieved in the South Asian region by fostering mutual understanding, good neighbourly relations and meaningful cooperation among the Member States, which are bound by ties of history and culture. At the same time, our founding Leaders were aware of the common problems, interests and aspirations of the peoples of South Asia and the need for joint action and enhanced cooperation within their respective political and economic systems and cultural traditions. Moreover, they were convinced that regional cooperation among the countries of South Asia is mutually beneficial, desirable and necessary; and that economic, social and technical cooperation among the countries of South Asia would contribute significantly to national and collective self-reliance.

SAARC commenced mutual collaboration in non-controversial areas such as health, communication and postal services at its initial phase as a confidence-building measure among one another. The Association embraced the crucial area of regional economic cooperation in early 1990s, following the conclusion of the SAARC Regional Study on Trade and Manufactures. Areas of regional cooperation continued to grow over the years. SAARC today stands to cater to almost all the spheres of human activity, with the overarching goal of poverty alleviation.

The Association has witnessed eighteen Summit meetings of the Heads of State or Government, with the last one held in Kathmandu under the theme, Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity. The Eighteenth Summit Declaration laid emphasis on deepening regional integration for peace, stability and prosperity in South Asia by intensifying cooperation, inter alia, in trade, investment, finance, energy, security, infrastructure, connectivity and culture; and to implement projects, programmes and activities in a prioritized, result-oriented and time-bound manner.

As we commemorate the Thirty-first SAARC Charter Day, I would like to extend my warmest felicitations to the peoples and Governments of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

(Ajjan D. Thapa)
Secretary-General

Kathmandu, 8 December 2015

Post Box No. 4222, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel.: 4-221785, Fax: 4-227033, 4-223991
E-mail: saarc@saarc-sec.org
Report on Activities
SAARC Regional Meeting of Programme Managers on TB and HIV/AIDS Control and Heads of National TB Reference Laboratories

SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) organized a meeting of National Programme Managers on TB and HIV/AIDS along with the meeting of Heads of National TB Reference Laboratories of Member States in Kathmandu from 30th September to 2nd October 2015.

The objectives of the meeting were:
- to share the achievements, experience, innovations and challenges in NTPs, NACPs and National Reference Laboratories,
- to discuss on SAARC Regional Strategy on TB and HIV/AIDS,
- to develop/finalize activities/plan of STAC according to the need of the Member States before Governing Board Meeting.

The delegation from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Nepal participated in the meeting.

Opening Session
Dr. Kiran Regmi, Chief Specialist (Additional Secretary) Ministry of Health & Population, Government of Nepal graced the meeting as Chief Guest. In her opening address, she mentioned that the magnitude of TB & HIV/AIDS in SAARC Region is high due to poverty, migration, rapid urbanization, HIV/AIDS epidemic & MDR/XDR TB. She also added that the Government of Nepal has given priority to address the challenges for effective management of TB as well as HIV/AIDS control, such as high risk group people, migrant workers, sex workers, drug users etc. She also mentioned that the community mobilization with involvement of private sectors in TB and HIV/AIDS control activities. She appreciated the role played by the SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre for control of TB and HIV/AIDS in the Region.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC welcomed the guests and participants by delivering welcome remarks. He conveyed the message of His Excellency Secretary General of SAARC, Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa for successful completion and fruitful outcomes of the meeting.

Dr. Verma highlighted the objectives of the meeting along with its expected outcomes. He requested the delegates for their contribution in in-depth discussion on the current achievements, good practices and challenges on TB and HIV/AIDS control programme. He also requested to discuss on role of National Reference Laboratories in the Region. He concluded his welcome speech by wishing the delegates a pleasant stay in Kathmandu.

Technical Session
Dr. Dipendra Raman Singh, Director, National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, Government of Nepal chaired the technical session of the meeting.

Dr. G. K. Bhatta, Research Officer, STAC made a presentation on “Current situation of TB and HIV/AIDS in the SAARC Region and Laboratory Issues”. Along with his
presentation, he explained the achievements of the Centre and status of the implementation of SAARC Regional Strategies for TB and HIV/AIDS in the Member States.

Country Presentations

Country presentations was focused on progress, innovations and challenges to achieve the MDGs, National policies & strategies and cross border issues on National TB & HIV/AIDS control programmes and the role of National Reference Laboratories in the region. It was also focused on the implementation of the SAARC Regional Strategies on TB and HIV/AIDS. As per SAARC practice, presentation of Bangladesh was followed by the presentation of Bhutan, India, Maldives and Nepal.

The review on implementation of recommendations adopted by the previous programme managers’ meeting was performed. The delegation of the meeting discussed on the proposed programmes for the year 2016 to recommend in the upcoming 25th meeting of the Governing Board of STAC.

The delegations of the meeting discussed on long term plan of SAARC Supra-national Reference Laboratory for TB and HIV/AIDS along with the issues of strengthening of existing laboratory in STAC. The meeting made the recommendations on different issues, such as:

- Collaborative Activities
- Cross border issues on TB and HIV/AIDS
- SAARC Supra-national Reference Laboratory for TB and HIV/AIDS
- SAARC Conference on TB, HIV/AIDS and Respiratory Diseases
- Matters related to TB and HIV/AIDS, such as urban TB, child-hood TB, compilation of epidemiological data and exchange of information on best practices etc. Similarly, it was also discussed to prioritize the large city intervention in the region on HIV/AIDS, preparation for elimination of parents to child transmission of HIV/AIDS and congenital syphilis in Member States in phase-wise manner.

Concluding Session

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC thanked all delegates and chairperson for successful completion of the meeting. On behalf of the participants, Dr. R. S. Gupta, Deputy Director General (BSD, STI & BTS), NACO, MoH & FW, Government of India delivered the remarks. He appreciated activities being carried out by STAC in control of TB and HIV/AIDS in the region. He also advised STAC for further development of SAARC Supra-national Laboratory for TB and HIV/AIDS. At the end he thanked for excellent hospitality offered by STAC, good arrangement for the meeting and support of the staff.

The Chairperson concluded the meeting with thanks to the delegates for their brain storming deliberations, formulation of recommendations and fruitful contributions.

SAARC Prize on Tuberculosis – 2015

The aim of the prize is to honour citizen/s or organizations of South Asia for their exemplary work towards control and prevention of Tuberculosis in the SAARC Region.

The Twenty-fifth meeting of the Governing Board of SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) has decided to honour SAARC Prize on Tuberculosis – 2015 to Ms. Shameema Hussain of Maldives for her remarkable contributions in control of Tuberculosis, who while working for TB control programme of Maldives for 37 years has contributed also in promoting awareness and reducing stigma and discrimination.

Ms. Shameema started her work in the field of public health in 1967 and retired in 2009 from the service as Deputy Director General of TB Control Programme, Maldives.

STAC wish to extend her a very big CONGRATULATION for getting this prestigious prize.
Commemoration of World AIDS Day 2015

World AIDS Day is observed globally every year on 1st December with objective to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS. “Getting to Zero” is the theme of this year’s World AIDS Day, which aims for “Zero new HIV infections, Zero discrimination, Zero AIDS-related deaths.”

STAC commemorated World AIDS Day 2015 by publishing Message of His Excellency Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Secretary General, SAARC. STAC also placed a hoarding board in its premises to make the people aware on HIV/AIDS. STAC participated in the joint function organized by National Centre for AIDS & STD Control, Nepal. Joint function was organized in Nepal Academy Hall, Kathmandu. In the function, different dignitaries express their views on situation of HIV/AIDS in World as well as in Nepal. Different organizations working for HIV/AIDS also participated in the function.

Exhibition was organized in the premises of the Nepal Academy by different non-governmental organizations by displaying their products, publications and awareness materials. A large number of people visited the exhibition and participated in the function.

STAC also covered the activities of World AIDS Day 2015 during the programme of 31st Charter Day of SAARC.
Celebration of 31st Charter Day of SAARC

On the auspicious occasion of 31st Charter Day of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) celebrated the occasion by publishing message of His Excellency Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Secretary General, SAARC on its website on 8th December 2015.

On this occasion STAC organized an awareness programme under the title of “Interaction Programme with Students and Teachers on SAARC and its activities in the Region”.

The programme was organized in STAC on 7th December 2015. The objective of the programme was to celebrate SAARC Charter Day by providing information about SAARC, its introduction, objective, functions, importance etc. to the college level students and teachers. Over 80 students and teachers from Chanakya College, Bhaktapur and staff of the NTP Nepal participated in the programme. Mr. Narayan Prasad Dahal, Act. Director, NTP, Nepal, Dr. Dipendra Raman Singh, Director, NCASC Nepal, Dr. Pramod Bhattarai, MO, NTC and Mr. Basuki Raj Regmi, Principal, Chanakya College, Bhaktapur, Nepal also attended the programme.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC welcomed the guests, participants and other invitees in the programme. He highlighted the SAARC, its background, objective, functions etc. He explained the need of an interaction programme and importance of celebrating the Charter day of SAARC. Dr. Verma also explained about SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC), its function, achievements, goal, objective, vision, mission etc.

Dr. G. K. Bhatta, Research Officer, STAC presented his presentation on status of TB and HIV/AIDS in the SAARC Region.

Dr. Pramod Bhattrai, Medical Officer, NTP Nepal presented presentation on general information on TB, its control and treatment. He also highlighted the achievements of National TB Control Programme (NTP), available services under NTP etc.

Dr. Dipendra Raman Singh, Director, National Centre for AIDS and SDT Control, Nepal highlighted about HIV and AIDS, its symptoms,
preventive aspects, awareness, education and knowledge. He also highlighted the current progress of National AIDS Control Programme and available services in Nepal.

An interaction session was held after completion of the presentations. Students asked different questions on TB and HIV/AIDS, which were answered by Dr. Verma, Dr. Bhattarai and Dr. Singh.

Mr. Basuki Raj Regmi, Principal, Chanakya H. S. School, Bhaktapur shared his experiences regarding the communicable diseases like TB and HIV/AIDS with the participants and officials. He thanked Director STAC for inviting them to participate in this type of knowledgeable activities which is very important to the students of Higher School level.

At the end of the programme, Director, STAC delivered closing remarks. In his remarks the mentioned that students are the next edition of the community, so they have to be informed properly about their health. He also added that the voice of children are listened by parents because nowadays children are more directives due to advance technology such as internet, different books and other publications and regularly updating their knowledge. Dr. Verma thanked all guests, participants and staff for their presence in the programme.

The 25th Meeting of the Governing Board of STAC

Twenty-fifth meeting of the Governing Board of SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) was held on 21st and 22nd December 2015 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Governing Board Members, Dr. Feda Mohammad Paikan and Dr. Abdul Hadi Hadi from Afghanistan, Mr. Mohammad Barikul Islam from Bangladesh, Dr. Dorji Wangchuk from Bhutan, Dr. V. S. Salhotra from India, Dr. Abdul Azeez Yoosuf from Maldives, Dr. Bikash Lamichhanne and Mr. Domath Aryal from Nepal, Mr. Javed Ahmed Umran, from Pakistan, Ms. Fathimath Najwa (representative of SAARC Secretary General) and Mr. Manzoor Riaz from SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu and Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma (Member Secretary) from SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre participated in the meeting. Governing Board Member from Afghanistan chaired the meeting.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC delivered welcome remarks in the opening session. Ms. Fathimath Najwa, Director, SAARC Secretariat highlighted the importance of ensuring that Regional Centre activities are based on the needs and demands of the region and that the quality and depth of the activities are more important than increasing the number of activities and further ensuring that the activities generate the results and impact are much needed by the region. In this regard, she requested the assistance and continued commitment of the focal points and the Governing Board Members in effective function of the STAC.

The Board reviewed the current year’s programme activities and recommended the programmes & budget for 2016, which are as follows:

**Activities Programmes:**

1. SAARC Regional ToT on Tuberculosis and Drug Resistant TB Infection Control
2. SAARC Regional ToT on Clinical Management of Drug Resistance TB
3. SAARC Regional Meeting of Programme Managers on TB and HIV/AIDS Control & SAARC

4. SAARC Regional Training on Anti-Retroviral Therapy

5. SAARC Regional Training on TB for Microbiologist on Culture & DST, Gene Xpert / NAAT and its Maintenance

6. SAARC Regional workshop to address the cross border issues for prevention and control of TB and HIV/AIDS in the Region


8. Preparatory work for SAARC Regional Third Conference on TB, HIV/AIDS and Respiratory Diseases - 2017

9. Study on challenges in diagnosis of DR TB by Gene X-pert in Bangladesh and Nepal

10. Research grants for studies on TB & Diabetes and HIV & HCV (co-infection)

11. Presentation & dissemination of research findings on TB & HIV/AIDS through participation in International Conferences

12. Presentation & dissemination of research findings on TB & HIV/AIDS and capacity building on the technical and managerial skills of personnel of STAC

13. Participation in the review of activities NTP and NACP in the SAARC Member States.

14. Technical Assistant support to the NTP/NACP, of SAARC Member States and STAC

15. Meeting of collaborating institutions for strengthening of networking WHO/UNAIDS/UNFPA & other collaborating institutes.

16. Thirteenth Round Proficiency Testing of SSM for NRLs of SAARC Member States

17. Conferment of SAARC Award on HIV/AIDS - 2016

18. SAARC Goodwill Ambassador’s Programmes for HIV/AIDS

19. Public Awareness and Advocacy programmes on TB and HIV/AIDS
   - World TB Day – 2016
   - World AIDS Day – 2016
   - SAARC Charter day - 2016

20. Distribution/e-circulation of STAC publications

21. Review of articles for SAARC Journals of TB Lung Disease and HIV/AIDS

22. Strengthening of SAARC Reference Laboratory for TB and HIV/AIDS

23. Update regional data on TB, HIV/AIDS and TB/HIV co-infection and analysis to generate evidence to the region

24. Identification and documentation of good practices (TB and HIV/AIDS) in the Region and widely circulation

25. Collection and sharing of all existing guidelines and frameworks (HIV/AIDS) relevant of the works of SAARC Member States

26. Printings
   - STAC Newsletters
   - STAC Journal of Tuberculosis Lung Disease and HIV/AIDS
   - SAARC Epidemiological Response on Tuberculosis & TB/HIV Co-infection 2015/2016
   - Annual Report - 2015
   - Revision of STAC at a Glance
   - Thirteenth Round proficiency Testing of SSM of NRLs of SAARC Members States
   - Wall Calendar - 2017 and other publications
   - Collection, Compile and e-circulation of published scientific articles and important news related to TB and HIV/AIDS in the National daily newspapers/journals

27. Strengthening of STAC Library acquiring scientific books and journals on TB and HIV/AIDS and updating of library software

Under the SAARC-UNDP/UNAIDS/UNICEF support

28. SAARC Regional Workshop for Planning and implementation of safe & large city intervention for HIV/AIDS and develop a plan to fulfill these gaps in the SAARC Member States

Activities carried forward from 2015 under Programme Cost Budget of 2016

29. Development of SAARC Regional Programme Guidelines on diagnosis and management of pediatric TB

30. Updating existing Documentary on TB and HIV/AIDS and documenting Goodwill Ambassador’s Programme and others activities.

31. Training of Trainers (TOT) Manual on Pediatric Tuberculosis
Brief News

E-Training Module for HIV TB launched

“e-Training module for HIV TB collaborative activities in India” has been launched on World AIDS DAY 1st Dec 2015, by Hon’ble Union Health & Family Welfare Minister Mr J. P. Nadda at New Delhi Media Centre. Hon’ble Mr. Shripad Naik, Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare, Secretary of Health Mr. B. P. Sharma, Additional Secretary Mr N. S. Kang, Dy. DG’s NACO, United Nations representatives in India, community members, media and other dignitaries were present in the function.

This innovative methodology of training launched as “Digital India Initiative”, will be helpful to impart the desired knowledge regarding TB/HIV with the purpose to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of Government of India’s response to TB/HIV. More than 16000 staff at District level including MOs, Staff Nurses, Counsellors and general health system Staff will benefit from this initiative.

Along with this Social Protection portal was also launched. Please find below the links

Link for e-training module HIV TB:

Observation visit of STAC by Members of SAARC Programming Committee

Mr. Dinkar Asthana, Joint Secretary and Mr. S. R. Patnaik, Under Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of India visited SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre, Thimi, Bhaktapur, Nepal on 23 December 2015. Both of the dignitaries observed the functioning of the Centre by visiting the Laboratory, Library and office rooms. The team obtained the information regarding SAARC TB Reference Laboratory which is upgrading as SAARC Supra-national Reference Laboratory for TB and HIV/AIDS. Both the dignitaries expressed their view and wished for fulfilling the mission of serving the people of SAARC by establishing SAARC Supra-national Laboratory for TB and HIV/AIDS.