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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

The world has committed to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

World AIDS Day is marked every year on December 1st worldwide since 1988 in order to raise awareness of epidemic, encourage progress in prevention, treatment and care of HIV/AIDS, and express solidarity and support for people affected by this disease. The theme of the World AIDS Day 2016 is “HANDS UP FOR #HIV PREVENTION.”

The HANDS UP FOR #HIV PREVENTION campaign will explore different aspects of HIV prevention and how they relate to specific group of people, such as adolescent girls and young women, key population and people living with HIV.

Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, due to lack of adequate and youth friendly reproductive health and HIV services, gender discrimination, gender based violence and poor educational opportunities. Furthermore girls are less able to negotiate condom use, putting them at a greater risk of contracting HIV.

Key population like Male having Sex with Males (MSMs), Female Sex Workers (FSWs), Injecting Drug Users(IDUs) have the highest risk of contracting and transmitting HIV because they have less access to prevention, care and treatment services and such behaviours are often stigmatized by society.

As a whole, the SAARC Region has a low level of HIV infection, but the sheer numbers of people living with HIV is quite high with the largest burden shared by three countries; India, Pakistan and Nepal.

In SAARC Member States the National AIDS Control Programmes are currently implementing a comprehensive programme throughout the Region to halt the HIV epidemic. The principal components of the programmes include interventions for target groups, HIV prevention campaign for general public, prevention of HIV transmission through blood and blood products, and capacity building. The commemoration of World AIDS Day throughout the SAARC Region is also a part of this response.

The STAC is working with the mission to support the efforts of National HIV/AIDS Control Programmes through evidence based policy guidance, coordination and technical support. Its goal is to minimize the mortality and morbidity due to HIV/AIDS in the Region and to minimize the transmission of HIV infections until HIV/AIDS cease to be a major public health problem in the SAARC Region.
MESSAGE

The eighth of December each year, since the inception of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, unfolds anniversary day of SAARC Charter and this day in December 2016, we celebrate the Thirty-second Charter Day. Thirty-two years, after its founding, the SAARC remains a beacon of hope in South Asia.

As defined in its Charter, the primary objectives of SAARC are to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life through accelerated economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region. Cooperation within the framework of the Association shall be based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and mutual benefit. Such cooperation shall not be a substitute for bilateral and multilateral cooperation but shall complement them.

SAARC has made considerable progress since its emergence more than three decades ago. Some of the major achievements of SAARC include the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), South Asian University (SAU) and SAARC Development Fund (SDF), which is its umbrella funding mechanism. There are eleven sub-regional and regional projects that are underway in the social sector with the support of the SDF, while its Economic and Infrastructure Windows are being operationalized soon, opening up ample avenues for project-based collaboration in these important sectors. In the meanwhile, the SAARC Secretariat is also coordinating six projects in the areas of agriculture, rural development and food security with the support from ADB, FAO, OIE, IFAD, UNESCAP and the Government of Korea.

The Charter Day, in its Thirty-second year, is indeed an occasion for the peoples of South Asia to take pride in SAARC’s achievements in the past and also to make a pledge together, with renewed vigour to collectively aspire for sustained prosperity of our peoples under the auspices of the Association. Further, I take personal pride in heading the organization during the past three years, and, together with colleagues from Member States at the Secretariat, it has been the most satisfying experience to work for the peoples of the region, focusing on goals enshrined in the SAARC Charter. The timeless values of the Charter must remain our guide. Our shared duty is to “unite our strength” to serve “we the peoples”. As we shine a light on this milestone anniversary, let us reaffirm our commitment to a better and brighter future for all.

I would like to express my deep appreciation and best wishes to our citizens for your vibrant role in building a peaceful and prosperous South Asian Community. Long Live SAARC!

Kathmandu, 07 December 2016

Ajit B. Thapa
Commemoration of World AIDS Day 2016

Theme: HANDS UP FOR #HIV PREVENTION

SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) commemorated World AIDS Day on the 1st December 2016 by participating in a function organized by National Centre for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC), Government of Nepal at City Hall, Kathmandu.

Hon’ble Minister Mr. Gagan Kumar Thapa, Ministry of Health, Government of Nepal graced the function as Chief Guest and Hon’ble State Minister Mr. Tara Man Gurung, Ministry of Health, Government of Nepal Chaired the function. Dr. Senendra Raj Upreti, Secretary, Ministry of Health, Government of Nepal and Director General, Department of Health Services, Government of Nepal Dr. Pushpa Chaudhari, present at the function.

Dr. S. C. Verma, Director, SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre along with the Professional Staff and GS Staff attended the function. Director, NCASC, Representatives from INGOs, NGOs, PLHIV and high level dignitaries also attended the function.

STAC displayed a Hoarding Board with awareness messages in Centre’s premises and supported NCASC, Nepal for organizing the function by providing the backdrop.

Observance of World AIDS Day 2016 in SAARC Member States

Afghanistan

The Ministry of Public Health, UN and partners, together with civil society and people living with HIV/AIDS, observed World AIDS Day 2016 at an event held in Kabul on 4th December with the theme “Dignity Above All Stop Stigma and discrimination in health care setting”. The aim of the event was to address HIV stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings and attract more people with high-risk behaviors for HIV testing and treatment in Afghanistan to decrease the number of new infections.” This is a call for action so that every individual living with HIV can enjoy the
highest possible level of health through life long access to HIV care and treatment. The World AIDS Day's ceremony in Kabul was attended by the head of Deputy Minister of Public Health, H.E. Dr. Njia Tariq, Dr. Mujiburaham “Samkani” Parliament Member, Line Ministries representatives, WHO representative, UNDP representatives, national and international NGOs, and people living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV) and drug users.

Source: http://www.nacp-moph.gov.af/?p=949

Bangladesh
Advocacy for HIV/AIDS during World AIDS Day 2016 in Bangladesh through print/electronic media:

December 1st marks Worlds AIDs Day, which was the first global health day in 1988 and have been prevalent ever since. Observance of the day provides an opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV.

Many organizations and individuals choose to organize an event on or around World AIDS Day to raise awareness of HIV and also remember loved ones who have died. Globally, the day is identified symbolically with the red ribbon to show solidarity with people living with HIV, to celebrate survival and health, and to raise money for HIV and related causes. Every year there is a theme for World AIDS Day. This year’s theme is ‘Hands Up for #HIV Prevention’ which “aims to emphasize the different aspects of HIV prevention and what it means for specific groups of people”.

Source: http://www.share-netbangladesh.org/world-aids-day-2016/

India

(World AIDS Day, 2016 event organized by NACO at JLN Stadium, New Delhi on 1st December 2016)

Pakistan

(WORLD AIDS DAY 2016, NACP, Pakistan)

Source: http://www.nacp.gov.pk/library/gallery.html

(Photographs and information related to the activities organized to commemorate the World AIDS Day 2016 in SAARC Member States are downloaded from the NACP websites of respective programme. The information from Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka could not be found while downloading.)

Celebration of 32nd SAARC Charter Day

Interaction on SAARC, STAC & TB and HIV/AIDS with School Students & Teachers

On the auspicious occasion of the 32nd SAARC Charter Day, SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) organized an Interaction Programme with School Teachers and Students at Pharping Higher Secondary School, Pharping, Dakshinkali, Kathmandu under the School Partnership Programme on 7th December 2016. The programme was based on Introduction of SAARC and STAC along with the status of TB control and HIV/AIDS control programmes in Global and SAARC level.

Students are considered as revolutionary forces to change the community and they are also considered as Child Ambassadors to spread the messages for the control of TB and HIV/AIDS in the society. Schools are the focal points of the community, especially in the remote and rural areas to discuss the issue on different matters. Therefore, it is the suitable sector to build the partnership to make the community aware on TB and HIV/AIDS as well. Regarding the HIV/AIDS, still many young people cannot talk about AIDS either at home or in the community. Nor they can talk about the risk behaviours which lead to HIV infection. However, most young people do attend school at some point. Hence school can be considered as an entry point where these topics can be addressed. The strengths of a school setting are that children have an education curriculum, teachers and a peer group for discussion. School can also help to shape the attitudes of children towards positive directions.

The objectives of the programme were:

- To make students & teachers aware about situation of TB & HIV/AIDS
- To build a cadre of child ambassadors through Programme Managers and School Teachers
- To know about SAARC, its Charter and benefit of SAARC to its Member States.

Over 100 students of grade 10, 11 & 12 along with the concerned teachers participated in the programme. Mr. Krishna Prasad Shrestha, Principal of school welcomed all participants, resource persons, Director and staff of STAC.

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC made his presentation on Introduction, functioning and objectives of SAARC and STAC.

Dr. Ashish Shrestha, World Health Organization (WHO), Nepal presented situation of TB in the World and South East Asia.

Dr. Ajith Weerakoon, Epidemiologist, STAC, presented his presentation on Situation of TB and HIV/AIDS in the SAARC Region


Dr. Tarun Poudel, Director, National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, Government of Nepal presented his presentation on General Information on HIV/AIDS and Current Situation and Achievement of National HIV/AIDS Control Programme in Nepal.

Dr. Ajith Weerakoon, Epidemiologist, STAC presented his second presentation on Role of Students and Teachers in Control and Prevention of TB and HIV/AIDS.

Miss Manisha Maharjan, Grade 12 gave her remarks on behalf of participating students

Mr. Shyam Bahadur KC, Teacher gave his remarks on behalf of participating teachers Mr. Dasharath Balami, Chairman, School Management Committee gave his remarks and concluded the programme

STAC’s publications were handed over to Principal for use in School Library. Participants were provided publications of STAC as resource materials along with stationery.

**Outcome:**

The participating students/teachers became aware on TB and HIV/AIDS and its control mechanism and available services in the country. Simultaneously, they also gained knowledge on SAARC, its importance in the country for the all round development of the people of the Region as a whole.

**Participation in the 47th UNION World Conference on Lung Health**

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC participated in the 47th UNION World Conference organized in Liverpool, UK from 26th to 29th Oct. 2016. In the Conference most of the National Programme Managers of TB Control in SAARC Member States participated, congregated and utilize the opportunity to share their experiences and renewal their cooperation required for the control of TB in the Region.

**Participation in 9th Meeting of the Regional Advisory Committee on MDR-TB**

Dr. Sharat Chandra Verma, Director, STAC participated at the 9th Meeting of the Regional Advisory Committee on MDT-TB organized by WHO/SEARO held in Kathmandu, 17th - 19th Oct. 2016.