



VISION

**On Elimination of TB
and HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the SAARC Region**

SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC)



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and HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the SAARC Region

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Preface

The Heads of State or Government of Member Countries of SAARC at their Fifth Summit held in Male from 22-23 November 1990 decided to establish SAARC Tuberculosis Centre in Nepal. The Centre was established in 1992 to work for control and prevention of Tuberculosis in the Region. Considering the role played by the Centre through its activities, the Centre was renamed as SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/ AIDS Centre by the thirty-first Session of Standing Committee of SAARC held in Dhaka on November 9-10, 2005 (during the Thirteen SAARC Summit) to work for prevention and control of TB and HIV/AIDS in the Region by coordinating the efforts of the National Tuberculosis and National HIV/AIDS Programmes of SAARC Member Countries.

The Twenty Seventh Meeting of the Governing Board of SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) recommended for revision of a long term Vision document which was proposed to be used as a guiding principle. The revised vision document was recommended by Twenty-eighth meeting of Governing Board and endorsed by 56th Programming Committee.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Governing Board Members, Programme Managers, National TB and HIV/AIDS Programmes. Line Ministries, Ministries of Foreign/External Affairs, Member States of SAARC, SAARC Secretariat and different partners for their support, coordination & contribution for the Centre. I am confident that the more support and cooperation will be continued in future to meet the vision of STAC.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad Pant
Director
SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre

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Acronyms

ACSM	:	Advocacy, Communication and Social Mobilization
AIDS	:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
DST	:	Drug Susceptibility Testing
EQA	:	External Quality Assessment
HIV	:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HR	:	Human Resources
HRD	:	Human Resource Development
MARPs	:	Most at Risk Populations
MDGs	:	Millennium Development Goals
M & E	:	Monitoring and Evaluation
NRLs	:	National TB Reference Laboratories
NTP	:	National TB Elimination Programme
PLHA	:	People Living with HIV/AIDS
SAARC	:	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SRL	:	Supranational Reference Laboratory
STAC	:	SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre
STRL	:	STAC TB Reference Laboratory
TB	:	Tuberculosis
TRC	:	Tuberculosis Research Centre
UNGASS	:	United Nations General Assembly on Special Session on HIV/AIDS
WHO	:	World Health Organization
IHR	:	International Health Regulation
ATT	:	Anti Tuberculosis Treatment
ART	:	Anti-retroviral Therapy
ICT	:	Information and Communication Technologies
SDGs	:	Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction:

SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) was established in 1992. The Centre started its functioning as SAARC TB Centre in 1994. The Centre had been supporting the National TB Programmes of the SAARC Member States. The thirty –first session of Standing Committee of SAARC held in Dhaka on November 09th – 10th 2005, appreciated the efforts of the Centre on TB/HIV Co-infection and other works related to HIV/AIDS discipline and approved renaming the Centre as **SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre**. STAC, with its efforts and its effective networking has been recognized by the Member States as a centre contributing significantly for the control and prevention of TB and HIV/AIDS. The eighteenth meeting of the Governing Board 13th-14th October 2018 Kathmandu, Nepal recommended STAC to develop a long term vision document which will not only help STAC to formulate its strategy but also help in planning its activities for the coming years to achieve its objectives by coordinating with National TB and HIV/AIDS Programmes of the SAARC Member States. The STAC Vision Document will support the Member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and achieving the time bound pledges of the United Nations General Assembly on Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) and beyond. STAC shall review its vision document, make amendments and revision, if required and again plan its activities for the coming years.

STAC is now entitled with a Centre of Excellence to support SAARC Member States for elimination of TB & HIV/AIDS epidemic, which are necessitated by its regional mandate.

Vision:

SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) plays the role as a leading institute to support and guide SAARC member states to make the region free of TB and HIV/AIDS.

Mission:

- To support the efforts of National TB and HIV/AIDS Programmes through evidence based policy guidance, coordination and technical support.

Goal:

- To bring to an end the morbidity and mortality due to TB and HIV/AIDS in the region and end the transmission of both infections until TB and HIV/AIDS cease to be major public health problems in the SAARC Region.

Objective:

- To eliminate TB and end HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region by coordinating the efforts of the National TB Programmes and National HIV/AIDS Programmes of the SAARC Member States.

STRATEGIES:

1. Political and Administrative Commitment for TB Elimination and Ending HIV/AIDS Epidemic Strategies:

SAARC Member States are highly committed to tackle the major public health problems including Tuberculosis & HIV/AIDS. The commitment is both at the National & Regional level. The epidemiology of Tuberculosis & HIV/AIDS needs sustained effort in order to address these problems. Hence, it becomes mandatory to sustain the political and administrative commitment so that these diseases cease to exist as major public health problems.

Political and administrative commitment has been recognized as a crucial element for the successful prevention and elimination of infectious diseases like TB and HIV/AIDS. Lack of political commitment will hamper the development of important policies as well as the implementation of policies in relation to the elimination of TB and ending HIV/AIDS epidemic at the regional and national level. Therefore, the highest possible political and administrative commitment is the top most priority for the SAARC TB & HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) to make its' vision a reality.

Hence, STAC shall make efforts to build up/consolidate the existing level of Political & Administrative Commitment to ensure adequate and sustainable funding and required support for the National Programmes through internal & external funding sources.

In addition to the funding, STAC and SAARC Secretariat shall make efforts to ensure the committed participation of all the Member States in all its' activities.

2. Advocacy, Communication and Social Mobilization [ACSM]:

STAC has formulated ACSM Strategy in 2012. All the SAARC Member States have implemented their ACSM Strategy under National TB & HIV/AIDS Programmes with varied intensity depending upon the availability of

resources and the situation of the TB & HIV/AIDS disease in their countries. Both the diseases are influenced by associated stigma & discrimination which hamper the implementation of National Programmes to yield optimal results. In spite of the continued efforts of the National Programmes, the awareness amongst masses about Tuberculosis & HIV/AIDS is largely limited which influences the utilization of available services. The myths and misconceptions about the two diseases also cause roadblocks in the success of the National Programmes. The social structure and cultural beliefs in the SAARC region are largely similar in all the SAARC Member States.

Hence, ACSM Strategy (2018-2023) has been revised with amendments. This will not only contribute for the uniformity of the ACSM efforts by the Member States but will also be beneficial in the border areas where there is a mixing of the cultures of two Member States sharing borders. Programme will be focused on promoting behavioral change and to encourage sustained positive healthy behavioral among individuals and communities.

STAC has organized two successful Conferences in the years 2004 & 2008 which were attended by more than 800 delegates from SAARC Region & abroad and appreciated by all. The Regional Conference is a good platform for Advocacy, Networking, Sharing of latest research and updating the delegates on the latest policy and guidelines. Hence, SAARC Regional Conferences on Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS & Respiratory diseases will be organized regularly for the benefit of people of the region. Regionally well-known personalities will be nominated as SAARC Goodwill Ambassadors who will provide necessary prominence to the issue and ensure the message being reaches key stake holders.

Implementation of STAC, ACSM Strategy shall be monitored regularly for the activities to be conducted at the Regional level by STAC & National level by the Member States.

3. STAC Supranational Reference Laboratory:

SAARC TB Reference Laboratory (STRL) has been established under STAC, which already has a good network for Quality Assurance of Sputum

Microscopy with the **Ten National TB Reference Laboratories (NRLs) of the Member States under NTP**. STRL has been supporting NRLs in the area of quality assurance of microscopy network. Panel Testing is one of the three components for external quality assessment (EQA) or proficiency testing. STRL conducted first round of proficiency testing in Member States in 2003. Since then STRL has been conducting the Annual rounds of Proficiency Testing on its own. The fifteenth round of proficiency testing is being conducted by SAARC TB Reference Laboratory in 2018. In addition, STRL also provides training to different category of laboratory personnel and also conducts operational research to develop new effective methods for early diagnosis of Tuberculosis and early detection of Drug Resistant Tuberculosis. National Institute for Research in TB (NIRT), Chennai, India, functions as the WHO Supra-national Reference Laboratory for the SAARC region and National Institute of TB and Respiratory Diseases (NITRD), New Delhi, India functions as a WHO centre of excellence. Considering the geographical size, population and burden of TB and TB-HIV co-infection, there is an urgent need of establishing at-least one more SRL in the Region. For this, STAC has upgraded SAARC TB Reference Laboratory to SAARC Supranational Reference Laboratory for TB and HIV/AIDS. Standardization of culture and Drug Susceptibility Testing (DST) and the implementation of international Bio-safety measures are other challenges. STAC is working hard to initiate the functioning of the Supra-national Reference Laboratory. This will help to identification of standardization of culture and Drug Susceptibility Testing (DST), Quality Assurances of Laboratory Test, Scientific Research, Trainings, Organism Bank for future endeavor

STAC will also establish a network with identified National HIV/AIDS laboratory in the SAARC Region.

4. Dealing with cross-border issues on TB and HIV/AIDS:

Most of the Member States of the SAARC Region has reported as having low HIV prevalence. However, all the Member States are possessing high level of high risk factors to fuel the HIV epidemic in the SAARC Region. Migration across the international borders within the SAARC Region is one of the identified major risk factors. The cross-border issues pose a challenge

to effective HIV/AIDS and TB elimination in the SAARC Member States.

Cross-border issues in health such as HIV/AIDS and TB have emerged as major public health challenge which is attributed to differential implementation of elimination and prevention strategies as well as due to migration. A large number of migrant workers, truck drivers and trafficked women cross the porous borders, thus increasing the vulnerability to HIV, TB and MDR-TB in the border areas.

Problems specific for eliminating TB and ending HIV/AIDS epidemic in the border areas are due to;

- i. Constant and large scale migration causing difficulties in both case-finding and adherence to prescribed treatment
- ii. Lack of clear guidelines to extend health services to migrants leading to lack of access to services in host countries
- iii. Common referral mechanisms may be established in the SAARC Member States to continue treatment of TB and HIV/AIDS.
- iv. Poverty and lack of basic facilities expose them to adopt risk behaviours and put them at increased risk for acquiring and transmitting HIV/AIDS and TB.

Therefore, STAC shall support establishment of a mechanism to deal with cross-border issues in relation to TB and HIV/AIDS with coordination and collaboration of National TB and National HIV/AIDS Programmes of all the Member States. STAC shall sensitize the Cross Border issues in SAARC Health Minister's Meeting. In accordance with the SAARC Regional Strategy on HIV/AIDS, Elimination of TB, ACSM for TB and Migrant Health/Cross border issues in the SAARC Member States on TB and HIV/AIDS (2018-2023), the STAC shall make special efforts in establishing the mechanism to end the epidemic on HIV/AIDS and elimination on TB of the cross-border migrants. STAC shall work and scale up its efforts in the following areas:

- i. Acceptance and provision of care and treatment for the infected deportees and returning migrants including prisons and inmates.
- ii. Establishing networking of National TB elimination and ending HIV/AIDS epidemic programmes of Member States with community based organizations working with migrant workers.
- iii. Common referral mechanism with International Health Regulation (IHR) department and provision of Anti Tuberculosis Treatment (ATT) and Anti-retroviral Therapy (ART) may be established in the SAARC Member States on TB and HIV/AIDS to continue the treatment and thus to eliminate these disease.
- iv. STAC shall plan to conduct District Level Programme Manager's meeting in the region.

5. Human Resource Development

Human Resource Development [HRD] in health will continue to remain vibrant and responsive to the changing needs of the region. The overall aim of the HRD for health is to plan realistically, train effectively, deploy efficiently and utilize optimally to meet the needs of the health systems in the Member States of the SAARC Region. Capacity building of the Human Resources for effective implementation of the National TB & HIV/AIDS Programmes is one of the main activities by which STAC is extending support to the Member States. STAC shall sharpen this role for providing trainings to the National level Human Resources of the SAARC Member States in a need based and quality assured structure of the trainings which STAC provides. The quality of the trainings shall be continuously monitored, evaluated and improved. The STAC shall scale up the capacity building in relation to the prevention, treatment, care and support in the field of TB and HIV/AIDS. Research, Laboratory services, Data Management and Surveillance are some of the areas on which STAC will concentrate its capacity building activities through training, workshop etc. STAC will utilize its infrastructure for training local and international health workers on TB, HIV/AIDS and laboratory aspects etc.

Human Resource Development of staffs of National TB and HIV/AIDS Programmes in Member States:

The STAC shall prepare a strategy to improve the capacity of health care personnel working for TB and HIV/AIDS in the Member States of SAARC Region. The HRD shall be accomplished through well prepared good quality training on important aspects, in relation to service delivery on prevention, care and support of TB and HIV/AIDS. The conduction of training programmes will be decided by considering the unmet needs and demands of the Member States TB elimination and ending HIV/AIDS epidemic Programmes.

The STAC shall expand the pool of experts on TB and HIV/AIDS who will be utilized for the training and capacity building programmes for the SAARC Region. STAC will be continuing its Centre of Excellence activities related to training and research for supporting the Member States.

Human Resource Development of the staff of the SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre:

The vision for the next decade is to have adequate numbers of competent Professional as well as General Services Staff at the STAC, who shall have the knowledge, positive attitudes and skills necessary to plan and implement the activities necessary to achieve the goal of the STAC.

The STAC shall have a Human Resource Development plan with a clear 'HR Policy', of which updating their knowledge and the skills would be the core component in order to maintain an adequate and competent manpower to carry out regional activities with the best possible level of proficiency and efficiency.

6. Regional Resource Centre:

The STAC has upgraded its Regional Resource Centre. The capacity of the existing resource Centre is increased through staff training, expanding the availability of relevant text materials, journals, newsletters, archiving periodicals and online resources. In addition to the above, the STAC

upgraded the library as well as the epidemiological section by digitalization to obtain updated data on TB, HIV/AIDS and TB/HIV Co-infection and web-based resource for communication and advocacy material from the Member States.

The STAC has acquired the quality of the peer-reviewed SAARC Journal of Tuberculosis, Lung Diseases and HIV/AIDS, which is issued biannually. This journal is disseminated to the recognized academic institutions and National Programmes, National Level Institutes, relevant authorities of Member States in order to attract researchers to publish their articles. STAC has vision to publish an indexed journal in near future. Indexed journals are considered to be of higher scientific quality. It expands its online presence, improves article discoverability and builds reputation as a high-quality publication in this field.

The STAC shall continue to generate and update the Resource Materials on TB, HIV/AIDS, and TB/HIV Co-infection and on related subjects in order to serve the Member States in combating TB and HIV/AIDS epidemics. The Resource Materials will be widely distributed to the relevant institutes and individuals as per request for the benefit of the region.

The quality of the publications produced and disseminated by STAC shall be upgraded and used as a medium to disseminate updated, good quality, reliable data to the Member States.

STAC shall provide online limited access to important designated persons on request of the Member States working for the National Programmes and voluntary organizations working for elimination of TB & ending HIV/AIDS epidemic programme in the region and beyond.

STAC has established an Audio-Visual Section in order to support the National TB elimination and ending HIV/AIDS epidemic Programmes of the Member States in teaching and training the technical staff as well as in making the vulnerable populations and general population aware on the important and relevant aspects of TB and HIV/AIDS. This information is available in STAC library e-resources. Relevant online training courses will be started involving facilitators from member countries.

STAC shall continue updating its website in such a way to support the Member States to extract the important information on TB and HIV/AIDS efficiently. The STAC shall make its website more dynamic, user friendly and interactive.

7. Research :

Research should be regarded as a critical tool in developing an evidence based and effective health response to meet the needs of the TB elimination and ending HIV/AIDS epidemic and TB/HIV collaboration of the Member States of the SAARC Region.

The STAC shall upgrade its Research Unit at the STAC for collecting better evidence and best practices for prevention, treatment and care and support aspects of TB, TB/HIV Co-infection and HIV/AIDS.

The STAC shall improve both the quality and the number of research studies done in the region. The STAC has enhanced the capacity of the research section by recruiting qualified staff. The STAC shall continue interaction with the TB elimination and ending HIV/AIDS epidemic programmes of the Member States in order to identify prioritized research areas on various aspects of TB, TB/HIV Co-infection and HIV/AIDS.

The STAC shall encourage operational research conducted by both programmes as well as medical colleges in all Member States for the continuous improvement of the services delivered.

The Research unit shall have its Ethical Committee and Monitoring and Evaluation Board. Independent members will be included in both the committees. All the research protocols shall be submitted to Ethical Committee for its clearance. The Research Monitoring & Evaluation Board shall monitor all the research activities through monitoring of the interim Reports and give its suggestions and recommendations on the continuation of research according to safety & usefulness/effectiveness profile.

The STAC shall be responsible to make adequate funding for the research

studies planned, developing protocols and abide by the guidelines on each and every aspect strictly in order to obtain the best quality data to arrive at realistic conclusions. Timely release of fund upon work progress and time bound activity is another focus of STAC research. Medical Journals, Publications, Newsletters and STAC website shall be used to disseminate findings of research studies in a timely manner and make them available for all the Member States.

8. Humanitarian Assistance:

STAC shall plan joint investigation and preventive measure along with the communities in outbreak situation needed to be implemented within the Member States. STAC as a Regional Centre for SAARC shall play a pivotal role in Health Sector to provide technical assistance to the Member States for rapid response in the diseases/epidemic/disaster/urgencies/cross border issues/migration health issues etc.

9. SAARC Centre for Communicable Disease (SCCD)

Elimination of Communicable Diseases leads to reduction of disease incidence/ prevalence/ mortality etc. The Communicable Disease affects both individuals and community, so elimination efforts may be directed at both levels.

STAC shall undertake leading efforts to include Communicable Diseases to support and guide the SAARC member states to make the region free of these diseases since the STAC has all sufficient infrastructure including SAARC Supranational Reference Laboratory for TB and HIV/AIDS.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation play a specific and crucial role in providing information to measure programme impact and achievement of immediate and long term objectives. It is particularly important for the programme implementers in making adjustments and taking programmatic and technical decisions.

The vision of the STAC is to have a routine constructive systematic monitoring and evaluation of its activities. The STAC shall appoint M&E committee for regular internal reviews using input and output indicators in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) enable tools and process evaluation shall be conducted to observe the process of implementation of the planned activities. These internal reviews will be used to rectify any significant shortcomings then and there. For the external reviews, the STAC shall appoint an expert panel selected from the Member States and get their recommendations in order to improve the quality of the activities provided by the STAC.

11. STAC as Collaborating Centre with International Agencies including WHO & other UN organizations:

STAC is recognized as a WHO collaborating Centre for TB, TB/HIV, Training and Research. STAC shall strengthen its association with WHO and other UN organizations as a International Collaborating Centre

12. Miscellaneous :

STAC has been conducting its activities based on the Regional requirements, felt needs and recommendations of the National TB & HIV/AIDS Programmes of the SAARC Member States by mandating the reports from the private sector, the strategies for elimination of Tuberculosis & ending HIV/AIDS epidemic are continuously evolving and changing based on new research findings, increased availability of evidence in the Era of Evidence-based Medicine. Therefore, STAC shall keep its Strategic, Vision and Plan slightly dynamic to be amenable to change based on the availability of more & better evidence, change in International recommendations and requirements of the National Programmes of SAARC Member States. STAC shall establish Regional Database of SAARC on TB and HIV/AIDS and also the SAARC Regional Museum.

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