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**STAC Newsletter**

(SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre)

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Editorial

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease that is a major cause of ill health and one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Despite, major advancement in the field the burden of disease still remains a problem in the SAARC region. In 2021 SAARC region bears about 38% of the global TB burden and 43% of global death due to TB. Three SAARC Member States namely India, Pakistan and Bangladesh lie among 30 high TB Burden countries. Nepal lies in high MDR-TB countries list along with these three high TB burden countries. However, there still remains the gap of 30% between the incidence and the notified cases.

Diagnosis and treatment in TB have boomed in last 10 years. Despite these SAARC regions is still suffering from robust diagnosis and management of TB at various levels. It is high time research is maximized in the region especially in the country where there is high burden of TB and MDR TB. Health seeking behavior in terms of reaching, seeking and receiving should be improved. We should be equally prepared to learn from downfall and improve translation, innovation and adoption to scale up TB screening, diagnosis and management especially at the grass root level. Only the team work could help eliminate TB in the region.

HIV/AIDS is still one of the deadliest pandemics of the current era despite global commitment to reduce AIDS-related deaths and new HIV infections. In 2021 SAARC region witness 66,280 people newly infected with HIV/AIDS. Among them 1.6 million people were accessing antiretroviral therapy and 3900 deaths were averted due to ART. The indicators of HIV/AIDS have been subsequently improving in the SAARC region. All the eight member states in the region were declared low prevalence country. Reporting and surveillance system has improved. However, we need to focus on the primary prevention of HIV/AIDS. This could contribute towards achieving six of the Sustainable Developmental Goals.

It is high time that scale up activities are strengthen at the system level to diagnose 95% of all HIV-positive individuals, provide antiretroviral therapy (ART) for 95% of those diagnosed and achieve viral suppression for 95% of those treated by 2030. Together in the region we can eliminate HIV/AIDS. TB on the other hand is no exception and needs similar health system level strengthening with robust input, process and output indicators.
Message from His Excellency Mr. Esala RuwanWeerakoon, Secretary General of SAARC on the Occasion of World TB Day / SAARC TB Day, 2023.

"Yes! We can end TB!"

Every year, the World TB Day and the SAARC TB Day are observed on 24 March with the objective to raise public awareness as well as to advocate for broader commitments for TB control and prevention.

The theme for this year, “Yes! We can end TB!” aims to combat TB beyond health system, which requires strong multi-sectoral collaboration and an effective accountability system. The chosen theme is topical given the urgent need to raise visibility and political commitment to increase investments, continue to include TB in priority public health programmes and implement national as well as global recommendations.

TB is one of the top infectious killers worldwide. It is estimated that 1.6 million people died from TB and 4.2 million people were undiagnosed and unreported in 2021. About 10.6 million people fell ill with TB in 2021. Drug Resistance TB has escalated by 3.1% in 2021 compared to 2020. It is, therefore, necessary to strengthen diagnosis and access to care.

In the SAARC Region, in 2021, an estimated 4 million cases accounted for 38% of the global burden of TB with 0.6 million deaths. During the year, there were 2.8 million notified cases and 2.6 million new and relapse cases.

More investment towards supporting the roll out of the WHO-recommended TB preventive treatments, Shorter TB Treatment Regimens, Rapid molecular diagnostics for TB, DR TB, TB infection, other innovations and digital tools are needed to save millions of lives. Similarly, sustained investment in research and innovation is vital to fast-track efforts to reach the “End TB” targets.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the National TB Programmes of the Member States. Challenges of the National TB Programmes like unreported cases, adverse economic and social situations, funding gaps, and inadequate involvement of private sectors, CBOs and NGOs need urgent attention and commitment from all stakeholders. There is also the need to modify guidelines and introduce innovative treatment modalities.

On this Day, I congratulate the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) for its continued support to the National TB Programmes of the Member States.

(Esala Ruwan Weerakoon)

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Commemoration of World TB Day-SAARC TB Day 2023

World TB Day and SAARC TB Day are commemorated on 24th March in every year as an International Day. The Government of SAARC Member States had decided in 1997 to commemorate World TB Day and SARC TB Day together on the same day with the same theme. This year is 141 years of commemoration since Dr. Robert Koch discovered that this disease was caused by TB bacillus in 1882. The theme of the Day this year is “Yes! We can Eliminate TB!” aims to inspire hope and encourage high-level leadership, increased investments, faster uptake of new WHO recommendations, adoption of innovations, accelerated action, and multisectoral collaboration to combat the TB epidemic.

Every year SAARC TB & HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) commemorates “World TB Day and SAARC TB Day by organizing various activities. This year STAC commemorated the World TB Day and SAARC TB Day 2023 by participating in the national TB Control Centre (NTCC), Nepal. International and National organizations, stakeholders and individuals who were directly/indirectly involved in the fight to eliminate tuberculosis.

STAC had published a “Factsheet on tuberculosis 2022” as an advocacy material which was disseminated on that day as well as uploaded in the Website also. Similarly, it had also published an article titled “We can Eliminate Tuberculosis” in the National Daily newspaper, The Rising Nepal.
**Brief News**

**Participation in the Programme on Minimum Service and Criteria of Specialized Hospitals in Nepal**


**Participation of the Director in the meeting on Digital Awareness (E-literacy)**

Ms. Yeshoda Aryal, Director STAC participated in the meeting on “Digital Awareness (E-literacy)” organized by the Ministry of Health and Population on 4th January, 2023 in the Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal. The meeting discussed about the digital awareness/e-literacy among the medical personnel working in the health field.

**Participation in the meeting of Work plan of Health Insurance in Nepal**

Participation in the Global Fund Team meeting Developing NTP Fund Requirements Assessment Briefing

Dr. V.P. Myneedu, Sr. Microbiologist, Deputy Director (o) participated in the virtual meeting on the “Global Fund Team Meeting Developing National Tuberculosis Programme (NTP) Fund Requirements Assessment Briefing” on 19th January, 2023 organized by the Global Fund. The meeting highlighted on the PPM intervention, Lab Network strengthening by expanding EQA, Increase trainings for propagating newer guidelines of TB, DRTB, and Childhood TB recording and report improvement. The Global Fund team lead by Dr. Jamie Tonsing, advisor TB, GF, Geneva, NTCC Team lead by Dr. Naveen Shah and Mrs. Rita Bhandari were also present in the meeting.

Participation of Sr. Microbiologist virtually on the meeting on PPM in Bangladesh and Pakistan

Dr. V.P. Myneedu, Sr. Microbiologist, Deputy Director (o) participated in the virtual meeting on the “Public Private Mix (PPM) in Bangladesh and Pakistan” on 26th January, 2023. The meeting discussed on the progress made in Bangladesh and Pakistan in engaging private healthcare providers BRAC in Bangladesh and Mercy Corps in Pakistan, as well as recommendations from the recent joint monitoring missions. The TB workers actively participated in this virtual meeting.

Participation of Sr. Microbiologist virtually on shorter TB Drug Regimens: How to improve Access for Private Providers

Dr. V.P. Myneedu, Sr. Microbiologist, Deputy Director (o) participated in the virtual meeting on “Shorter TB Drug Regimens: How to Improve Access for Private Providers” on 2nd February, 2023. The meeting discussed on the campaign focused on access to shorter TB regimens, which is of crucial importance to offer TB patients better care by all healthcare providers (including those in the private sector). All TB workers and Free for TB Public private mix (PPM) members actively participated in the meeting.
Participation in the Monitor 2\textsuperscript{nd} Round of Frontline FETP Course

Dr. Prajjwal Pyakurel, Research Officer, participated in the meeting on “Monitor 2\textsuperscript{nd} Round of Frontline Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) Course organized by National Health Training Centre, (NHTC), Government of Nepal on 29-4\textsuperscript{th} February, 2023 in NHTC.

Visit of His Excellency Secretary General, Director (SA) and Admin Officer the SAARC Secretariat in STAC

On the invitation of Director, STAC, His Excellency Mr. Esala Ruwan Weerakoon, Secretary General, Mr. Ismail Mamdhooh, Director, Social Affairs and Mr. Madhu Sudan Lamichanne, Administrative Officer, SAARC Secretariat visited to SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre on 8\textsuperscript{th} February, 2023. H.E. the Secretary General and his team were welcomed by the Director, Professionals and the GSS staff of the Centre. On this occasion, the Secretary General was briefed about the activities of the Centre by the Director, STAC. His Excellency& his team also observed the infrastructure and functioning of the Centre. H.E. expressed his satisfaction of the progress and functioning of the Centre and assured to support the Centre in the coming days.

Farewell to Ms. Yeshoda Aryal, Director, STAC

A farewell function was organized to honour the outgoing Director STAC, Ms. Yeshoda Aryal, on 14\textsuperscript{th} February 2023. Dr.V.P. Myneedu, Sr. Microbiologist, Deputy Director (o) handed over the letter of appreciation on behalf of STAC. All staff of the Centre expressed their gratitude to Ms. Aryal for her support guidance and her cooperation to carry out the activities of STAC. Her guidance and co-operation was highly acknowledgeable. STAC family wishes her a bright future. Ms. Aryal thanked all the staff members of STAC and hoped to support all the activities of the Centre in the future.
Nomination as Peer Reviewer by M/S Elsevier for review of various Med Journals

Dr. V.P. Myneedu, Sr. Microbiologist, Deputy Director (o) participated in the virtual meeting organized by M/S Elsevier on 2nd March, 2023. He was nominated and certified as a Peer Reviewer of the Med Journals. Dr. V.P. Myneedu informed the meeting that he had previously reviewed research articles in the Indian Journal of Tuberculosis and the Open Microbiology Journal of BMJ also.

Visit to TB Center, GENETUP, Kalimati, Kathmandu

Dr. V.P. Myneedu, Sr. Microbiologist/Deputy Director (o) and Dr. Prajjwal Pyakurel, Research Officer, STAC, Doctors and officials of Nepal TB Association visited to TB Centre German-Nepal TB Project (GENETUP) on 13th March, 2023. The team reviewed the functions of the TB Center GENETUP and the routine activities of the TB Reference Laboratory. Dr.Bhawana Shrestha, In-Charge, GENETUP briefed the team about the various activities done by the Center.

Visit to District Health Office, Kavre, Sindhupalchowk

Dr. V.P. Myneedu, Sr. Microbiologist/Deputy Director (o) and Dr. Prajjwal Pyakurel, Research Officer, STAC attended the half yearly review meeting of TB focal points of the district from 13-15th March 2023. The half yearly review meeting focused on Planning and Monitoring workshop of NTP. The review team also included Dr. Purusotam Raj Shedain, Senior Health Administrator, from health office, Kavre palanchwok, Lab worker, Programme Co-ordinators of the district and Bagmati Province health director.
Workshop on Community Capacity Building for Effective Engagement towards Ending TB in SEAR

Dr. V.P. Myneedu, Sr. Microbiologist/Deputy Director (o) participated in the “Workshop on Community Capacity Building for Effective Engagement towards Ending TB in SEAR” on 13-15th March, 2023 at Hotel Radisson, Kathmandu. The workshop discussed with the several international NGOs and Community based Organizations CBOs on the Role of NGO and CBO and their capacity build up for effective management of NTPs across South East Region. The workshop also agreed to incorporate the inputs received and prepare a common document later to be brought out by WHO (SEARO).

Participation in the Result Dissemination of Research- Addressing the Social Determination and Consequences of Tuberculosis (ASCOT). A Pilot Implementation Trail & Process Evaluation in Nepal

On the invitation of Birat Nepal Medical Trust (BNMT), the officer In-charge, Dr. Prajjwal Pyakurel, Research Officer, participated in the result dissemination of “Research- Addressing the Social Determination and Consequences of Tuberculosis (ASCOT): A Pilot Implementation Trail & Process Evaluation in Nepal” held on 27th March 2023.

Participation in the Conference on Addressing Global Challenges through Collaboration and Partnership in Research and Higher Education

Dr. Prajjwal Pyakurel, Research Officer, participated in the “Conference on Addressing Global Challenges through Collaboration and Partnership in Research and Higher Education” on 29th March 2023, organized by Dhulikhel, Hospital, Nepal.
Dr. Roshan Neupane was appointed and joined the SAARC TB and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC) in the post of Director on 10th May 2023. STAC staff welcomed him in the STAC family.

Dr. Neupane had done his graduation (MBBS) and post-graduation (MS Orthopedics) from Nepal. He has also done Master’s Degree in public health from China.

He started his medical career as an Acting Medical Superintendent from District Hospital and District Health Office, Manang. During his service period, he also served different Organizations, in different positions, under the Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal.

He has vast experience of Ministry of Health and Population, Federal as well as provincial and district level organizations. He is an expert surgeon too. Upon the recognition of his contribution and dynamic leadership, he was awarded with “SWASTHYA SEWA PURASKAR- 2016” by Ministry of Health and Population. Similarly, he was awarded with “PRABAL JANA SEWA SHREE PADAK – 2018” by the Government of Nepal.

He used to carry out teaching learning activities in hospitals and has different short trainings on the relevant field.
Dr. Roshan Neupane, Director, STAC made a courtesy visit to His Excellency Mr. Esala Ruwan Weerakoon, Secretary General, SAARC Secretariat on 26th May, 2023. During the courtesy visit the Director (STAC), briefed His Excellency and the Director (Social Affairs) about the Centre.

Dr. Roshan Neupane, Director, STAC headed a seven members committee constituted by Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal evaluated & disseminated the finding of the minimum services standards of Narayani Hospital, Birgunj, Parsa District of Nepal on 28-31st May, 2023.
Participation of Director in the meeting of Global Fund Application Grant Cycle 7 National Consultation on HIV/AIDS

Dr. Roshan Neupane, Director, STAC participated in the meeting on “Global Fund Application Grant Cycle 7 National Consultation on HIV/AIDS” organized by NCASC held in Hotel Shanker, Lazimpat on 7th July, 2023. The meeting discussed about the country dialogue process for grant cycle 7 of the Global Fund. It also discussed on the matter related to bring together key stakeholders in the field of HIV/AIDS in Nepal to strategize and develop a comprehensive funding application to be submitted to the Global Fund.

Participation of Director in the TB Federal level Consultation meeting

Dr. Roshan Neupane, Director, STAC participated in the meeting organized by NTCC on Global Fund application Grant Cycle 7 held in hotel Himalayan on 8th July, 2023. The meeting discussed the burden of TB Challenges plan to control in coming days.
Participation of Director in the meeting of South-South collaboration on Research and Innovation in Tuberculosis, NIRT, Chennai

Dr. Roshan Neupane, Director, STAC participated in the meeting on “South-South Collaboration on Research and Innovation in Tuberculosis” held on 11-12\textsuperscript{th} July, 2023 at the National Institute of Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT), Chennai, India.
SAARC Journal

SAARC Journal on “Tuberculosis, Lung Diseases and HIV/AIDS” Vol.20 No.1 2022 has been published and soft copy is available on the STAC Website homage and Nepjol.

SAARC Journal” Request for submission of article to SAARC Journal for the upcoming issue Vol. 21 No. 1 2023.” Articles can be submitted in the following email addresses journal@saarctb.org or research@saarctb.org.
Dr. Prajwal Shrestha, Director, National TB Control Center (NTCC) made a visit to SAARC TB & HIV/AIDS Centre, STAC on 15th June, 2023. Dr. Roshan Neupane, Director, (STAC) welcomed Dr. Shrestha in the Director’s chamber. He briefly highlighted the activities of the Centre. He also expressed his hope that STAC would collaboratively work with National TB Control Centre. In response, the Dr. Shrestha, Director, NTCC expressed his support and hope to work together. Dr. Shrestha also observed the physical facilities available in the Centre.

Staff meetings

For the smooth functioning of the Centre, it is necessary to have regular staff meetings in order to keep up with all works assigned to the officials. In this regard, regular staff meetings were conducted under the chairmanship of the Director and directions were given for the completion of the assigned works. Altogether, five staff meeting had been conducted during this period.
Glimpses of H.E. the Secretary General, SAARC visited to STAC 2023

H.E. the Secretary General of SAARC visited STAC on 8th February 2023

H.E. the Secretary General of SAARC with Staff Members of STAC.
Release of Sr. Microbiologist:

Dr. V.P. Myneedu, Sr. Microbiologist/Deputy Director (o), STAC has left the Centre on 30th June, 2023 as per the superannuation provision from his organization National Institute of Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases (NITRD). He had joined SAARC TB & HIV/AIDS Centre, (STAC) on 2nd March 2021 as a Sr. Microbiologist. During his tenure he had put up his effort for SAARC Supra National Laboratory in the Centre. STAC family wishes Dr. Myneedu a happy and comfortable retired life.