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Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **South-East Asia**

**Report on the virtual
meeting of the
Regional Programme
Review Group (RPRG)
for lymphatic filariasis,
soil transmitted
helminthiasis and
schistosomiasis in
South-East Asia Region**

13–16 July 2020

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1. Background and recommendations

1.1 Background

The Regional Director of WHO South-East Asia Region invited members of the Regional Programme Review Group (RPRG) for Lymphatic Filariasis (LF), Soil Transmitted Helminthiasis (STH) and Schistosomiasis (SCH) to review the progress of these programmes from 13 to 16 July 2020 with the following objectives:

- (1) review the status of national LF and SCH elimination and STH control programmes in each country and how these programmes have been affected by COVID-19 pandemic;
- (2) provide update on important technical issues and recent developments; and
- (3) discuss interventions and recommend course corrections to accelerate the LF and SCH elimination and STH control in the region.

The meeting was held virtually in view of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic situation and related travel restrictions. All sessions were conducted on a Zoom platform. The national programme managers for Lymphatic Filariasis (LF), Soil Transmitted Helminthiasis (STH) and Schistosomiasis (SCH) in WHO South-East Asia Region were invited to participate in the meeting and make presentations on progress made so far. All Member countries of SEAR, except Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and all members of the RPRG participated in the meeting. The list of participants includes programme managers from SEAR Member countries, RPRG members, WHO secretariat (HQ, SEARO and country offices) and invitees from donor/partner agencies (Annexure I). The detailed agenda of the meetings is given in Annexure II. Virtual meeting offered ample opportunities for the participants through chat box and voice interaction.

Dr Ahmed Jamsheed Mohamed, Regional Advisor, Neglected Tropical Diseases, WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, welcomed the RPRG members and other participants. Dr Jamsheed thanked Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed and Dr Nyoman Kandun for their leadership and valuable contribution made in their tenure as Chair of the RPRG.

Professor Dr Tjandra Yoga Aditama, Ag. Director, Department of Communicable Diseases (CDS), WHO-SEARO, opened the meeting with his remarks. He mentioned that Lymphatic filariasis (LF) is one of the flagship programmes of this Region in line with the NTD road map 2021-2030. Elimination of LF in three countries (Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand) have been validated by WHO. Bangladesh is expected to be validated in 2021. Mass drug administration (MDA) is continued in the remaining five endemic countries in the Region. Triple drug regimen is implemented in India and Timor-Leste while Indonesia is planning for triple drug regimen in 2020. Nepal and Myanmar are also preparing for triple drug-based MDA. Professor Aditama noted suboptimal coverage and transmission assessment survey (TAS) failures as major concerns in the Region. The Region accounts for about 54% of global burden of STH and has seen progressive improvement in the coverage of preventive chemotherapy. Suspected schistosomiasis infection in Myanmar was investigated. MDA for the control of schistosomiasis in the small focus of infection in Indonesia is being continued. Professor Aditama stated that COVID-19 had some implications on the timeline of LF elimination and STH control programmes in our Region.

Dr Jamsheed proposed the name of Dr Aditya P Dash, distinguished Scientist & Vice Chancellor of Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, India, as Chairperson which was endorsed by all members of the RPRG. Dr K. Krishnamoorthy, Senior Consultant (LF)

was appointed as Rapporteur. Prof. Dash chaired the meeting and conducted the proceedings.

Dr Mwelecele Ntuli Malecela, Director of the Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases, WHO/HQ, addressed the participants on the NTD Roadmap 2030. While complementing three countries that achieved elimination of LF, she wished more countries to achieve this milestone. She also complemented Timor-Leste for the great achievement in implementing triple drug therapy nationwide, through partnership and collaboration, despite operational challenges. Dr Mwelecele emphasized on disease-specific targets and crosscutting targets and expectation from countries. She briefed on the role of stakeholders at all levels and in all sectors. She discussed the sustainability plan and projected timeline and mentioned that the concept of multiple approaches and action, partnership and moving together, the NTD roadmap targets can be met.

Dr Jonathan King, Scientist, Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases, WHO/HQ, presented an update on the progress of GPELF. As per the revised global estimates of LF, based on geo-spatial analysis, a reduction from 198.7 million infected people in 2000 to 51.4 million in 2018 has been recorded, which amounts to 74% reduction in the disease burden. NTD road map target for GPELF was also presented. The new triple drug regimen has been implemented in 11 countries within two years of its recommendation as an alternate strategy. Globally about 7.7 billion cumulative treatments have been provided so far. About 579 million people are no longer requiring MDA. The reduction in LF infection was about 66% in the Region. However, there is some gap in treating the people requiring MDA. Dr Jonathan mentioned that WHO is preparing a series of guidelines [Field Guide for Alternative MDA, MMDP-Aide Memoire (2nd edition), Safe administration of NTD medicine, Protocol for stopping IDA-MDA and Revised M&E Guidance] to support the Member countries in implementing and evaluating LF elimination programme and enabling the countries to achieve the global target of elimination of LF as public health problem. WHO has coordinated in the procurement and supply of about 2.1 million FTS kits so far for evaluating elimination programme. Dr Jonathan also mentioned about the initiative in generating data on the STH prevalence to assess the impact of STH programme in terms of duration of MDA programme in Member countries.

Dr Jamsheed, Regional Advisor, Neglected Tropical Diseases, WHO-SEAR, presented an update on the LF elimination and STH control programme in the Region. During 2019, 4 out of 5 countries requiring LF-MDA carried out MDA and about 348.8 million people were treated. India and Timor-Leste treated about 42.5 million people with IDA. Indonesia and Myanmar are preparing to implement IDA in selected districts in 2020 and 2021 respectively. MDA has been stopped in about 70% of total implementation units in the

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