

TITLE: Seventy-second Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, New Delhi, India, 2–6 September 2019

SUBTITLE: A Summary Report by the Chairperson, H.E. Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Science & Technology and Earth Sciences, Government of India

PART 1: TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

- **Programme Budget 2020–2021**: The Committee noted that the Programme Budget 2020–2021 was approved by the Seventy-second World Health Assembly in May 2019 and is the first Programme Budget that fully articulates the implementation of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW13). The overall approved budget for 2020–2021 is US\$ 4 840.4 million of which South-East Asia (SEA) Region is receiving US\$ 388.5 million as base budget (with an increase of US\$ 99.7 million as compared with Programme Budget 2018–2019). Of this US\$ 388.5 million, allocation of US\$ 277.9 million is for country level and US\$ 110.6 million is for the regional level. This US\$ 99.7 million increase in base budget is distributed to polio transition (US\$ 69.9 million), increase in country capacity (US\$ 19 million) and for data and innovation (US\$ 10.8 million). The Committee adopted the Resolution *SEA/RC72/2* entitled “*Programme Budget 2020–2021*”, endorsing the report and recommendations of the Twelfth Meeting of the Subcommittee on Policy and Programme Development and Management.
- **Review of the Draft Provisional Agenda of the 146th Session of the WHO Executive Board**: The Committee was informed that the 146th Session of the WHO Executive Board would be held at WHO Headquarters in Geneva on 3–8 February 2020. Any proposal from a Member State or Associate Member of WHO to include an item on the Agenda should reach the WHO Director-General not later than 12 weeks after the circulation of the Draft Provisional Agenda or 10 weeks before the commencement of the Session of the Executive Board, whichever is earlier. Proposals should, therefore, reach the Director-General by 18 September 2019. The Committee noted the Draft Provisional Agenda of the 146th Session of the WHO Executive Board. It adopted the decision *SEA/RC72(1)* entitled “*Review of the Draft Provisional Agenda of the 146th Session of the WHO Executive Board*” endorsing the proposals by Member States for agenda items on ‘Strengthening the control of harmful use of alcohol’, ‘Integrated People-Centered Eye Care’, and ‘Patient Safety’ for inclusion in the Provisional Agenda of the 146th Session of the WHO Executive Board. The Committee requested the Member States to support Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka in submitting proposals with an explanatory memorandum on behalf of the South-East Asia Region in a timely manner for consideration by the Officers of the Executive Board.

PART 2: TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

- **Ministerial Roundtable-Emergency Preparedness:** The resolution *SEA/RC72/1* was adopted by the Committee endorsing the “*Delhi Declaration on Emergency Preparedness in the South-East Asia Region*”¹. It urged the Member States to implement the Delhi Declaration and requested the Regional Director to report on progress on the implementation of the Declaration to the Regional Committee every two years until 2030. The WHO publication entitled “*Invisible-The Rohingyas: the crisis, the people and their health*” was launched².
- **Programme Budget 2018–2019: Implementation and mid-term review:** Information on technical and financial implementation status of the Programme Budget 2018–2019 was provided to the Committee. It appreciated the significant health achievements made in the Region in various technical programmes, particularly in polio eradication, NCDs, communicable diseases and emergencies. The Committee expressed satisfaction that the SEA Region is the first among the regions in terms of utilization against allocated Programme Budget (75%) and utilization against distributed resources (82%). The Committee noted that more than 80% of the technical and financial resources are devoted to the Flagship Priorities to drive impact at the country level with a focus on the “value for money” approach. The Committee acknowledged the support extended to Member States by the Regional Office by increasing allocation of total resources to the WHO country offices to 77%, while retaining only 23%.
- **Evaluation: Annual Report:** The Committee noted that the Region has made considerable progress in implementing the South-East Asia Region evaluation workplan for 2018–2019. As of mid-June 2019, two evaluations had been completed, eight were ongoing and two had been initiated. In addition, two evaluations initiated in 2017 have been completed. An evaluation of the Regional Committee Resolutions was proposed for inclusion in future evaluation workplans.
- **Accelerating the elimination of cervical cancer as a global public health problem:** The Global Call to Action towards the elimination of cervical cancer as a public health problem reflects the importance accorded to this subject by the WHO Director-General. The cervical cancer elimination is a priority under the Regional Director's Flagship Programme of “Prevent and control noncommunicable diseases through multisectoral policies and plans with a focus on best buys”. The 144th session of the Executive Board requested the WHO Director-General to draft a global strategy to accelerate cervical cancer elimination for the period 2020–2030 for consideration by the 146th session of the Executive Board and the Seventy-third World Health Assembly in 2020. The Committee noted that significant progress has been made by Member States in the Region towards the elimination of cervical cancer as a public health problem and achievement of the interim global targets by 2030. The importance for an uninterrupted supply of vaccine was highlighted. Since the HPV DNA test was too expensive for a population-based screening programme, the Committee requested WHO to consider pooled procurement of screening test kits at an affordable cost.

¹ http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/rc/72/decisions_resolutions_RC72/en/

² <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/327083>

- **Annual report on monitoring progress on UHC and health-related SDGs**: The Seventieth session of the Regional Committee for South-East Asia requested the Regional Director to “include an annual report on monitoring progress on UHC and health-related SDGs as a substantive Agenda item until 2030” (*Decision SEA/RC70(1)*³). The latest publication titled “*Monitoring progress on universal health coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals in the South-East Asia Region, 2019*”⁴ highlighted the regionwide progress made on UHC in Member States and the SDGs indicator profiles based on available data. It included a special focus on noncommunicable diseases. It also included a section on primary health care services because of the renewed focus on primary health care that emerged with the Astana Declaration on primary health care in 2018. The Committee commended the annual report of 2019 and noted that the South-East Asia Region is the only Region reporting progress towards UHC and the health-related SDGs annually with the best and latest data available.
- **Revising the goal for measles elimination and rubella/congenital rubella syndrome control**: The Committee was informed that at its Sixty-sixth session in 2013 it had adopted resolution *SEA/RC66/R5*, in which the Region had committed itself to the goal of measles elimination and rubella/congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) control by 2020. A “Strategic Plan for Measles Elimination and Rubella and Congenital Rubella Syndrome Control in the South-East Asia Region 2014–2020”, had been developed for providing strategic technical guidance to achieve the goal. The Committee endorsed the recommendations of the ‘WHO South-East Asia regional high-level consultation on adopting the revised goal of measles and rubella elimination (March 2019), the ‘South-East Asia Regional Immunization Technical Advisory Group’ meeting (July 2019) and the Regional Verification Commission (2018) to revise the goal to “measles and rubella elimination by 2023” and adopted a resolution *SEA/RC72/3*, endorsing the “*Strategic Plan for Measles and Rubella Elimination in WHO South-East Asia Region: 2020–2024*”. The importance of a focused involvement of the existing resources available for national polio surveillance in Member States to provide intensive support for achieving measles and rubella elimination was highlighted. A regional publication titled “*Measles Elimination and Rubella Control in the WHO South-East Asia Region*”⁵ was launched.
- **Strengthening IHR and health emergency capacities through implementation of national action plans**: The Committee noted the progress made in the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) in the Region which included 100% compliance to State Party Annual Reporting (SPAR), eight countries having completed their joint external evaluations (JEE), five countries having completed after-action reviews (AAR), seven countries having developed national action plans for health security (NAPHS) and two countries having conducted simulation exercises (SimEx). Zoonoses, food safety, health service provision, risk communication, points of entry (ports, ground-crossing and airports) and preparedness for and management

³ <http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/rc/70/rc70-decisions.pdf?ua=1>

⁴ https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/326828?search-result=true&query=monitoring+progress+on+universal+health+coverage&scope=&rpp=10&sort_by=score&order=desc

⁵ https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/326852?search-result=true&query=measles+elimination+and+rubella+control&scope=&rpp=10&sort_by=score&order=desc

of chemical, biological and radionuclear (CBRN) events were identified as the weak areas to be strengthened. The Committee urged WHO to mobilize resources, garner support of and foster partnerships with the IHR key stakeholders in the Region for implementation of the Regional Strategic Plan (2019–2023) and establish a “Core group” of representatives from Member States to support governance and sustenance of the Regional Knowledge Network. Two publications titled “*Five-year Regional Strategic Plan to Strengthen Public Health Preparedness and Response (2019–2023)*”⁶, and “*Regional Risk Communication Strategy (2019–2023)*”⁷ were launched.

- **Regional Action Plan on Programmatic Management of Latent TB infection (LTBI) and Global Strategy for TB Research and Innovation:** The Committee recognized that the WHO South-East Asia Region bears nearly half the global burden of incident tuberculosis (TB) cases and more than a third of the latent TB infection (LTBI) burden. The Committee reiterated that “Accelerating efforts to End TB by 2030” is a WHO SEA Regional Flagship Priority. The Committee noted that the Regional Office, in consultation with Member States, technical partners, community representatives and experts, has drafted a Regional Action Plan for scaling up the programmatic management of LTBI. The Committee endorsed the Regional Action Plan and urged that its tenets may be included in the national TB control plans and strategic action plans. The Committee also endorsed the draft “Global Strategy for TB Research and Innovation”, which aims to support efforts by Member States to accelerate TB research and innovation by setting clear objectives and priorities for advancing the science required to end TB. The publication titled “*South-East Asia Regional Action Plan on Programmatic Management of Latent TB Infection*”⁸ was launched.
- **Regional Plan of Action for the WHO Global Strategy on Health, Environment and Climate Change:** The Committee was informed of the new WHO Global Strategy on Health, Environment and Climate Change which was announced by the Seventy-second World Health Assembly in May 2019 which sets out an integrated approach covering all relevant environmental determinants for improving lives and well-being through healthy environments. The Committee noted that a Regional Plan of Action to implement the Global Strategy on Health, Environment and Climate Change had been developed for consideration following a series of regional consultations. It focused on operationalizing the Global Strategy through actions needed from the national and regional perspectives of the SEA Region. The Committee endorsed the “*Regional Plan of Action for the WHO Global Strategy on Health, Environment and Climate Change 2020-2030: Healthy Environments for Healthier Population*” vide a resolution SEA/RC72/4. The regional publication “*SDG3 and Beyond: Healthy environments for a healthier population and the Sustainable Development Goals*”⁹ was launched.

⁶ https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/326856?search_result=true&query=strengthen+public+health+preparedness+and+response&scope=&rpp=10&sort_by=score&order=desc

⁷ <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/326853>

⁸ http://www.searo.who.int/tb/documents/latent_tb_infection/en/

⁹ <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/326570>

- **Regional Snake-bite prevention and Control Plan of Action:** The Committee noted that snake-bites are responsible for substantial mortality and morbidity in developing countries, including in Member States of the WHO South-East Asia Region. The Committee appreciated the proposal for drafting the evidence-based Regional Plan of Action on Snake-bite Prevention and Control in line with the WHO Global Strategy (2019). The Regional Plan of Action on Snake-bite Prevention and Control will cover advocacy, awareness, community empowerment, appropriate and accessible treatment for snake-bite victims, strengthening of health-care services at each tier of the health services, and collaboration among various stakeholders as mentioned in the global “Snake-bite Envenoming – A strategy for prevention and control”. The need for transfer of technology and sharing of success stories for improving coverage and providing best possible treatment to reduce mortality and morbidity was stressed.
- **Time and place of future Sessions of the Regional Committee:** The decision *SEA/RC72(2)* was adopted by the Committee on this agenda.

During the Regional Committee meeting, physical activity sessions were held in the mornings for the delegates which included Yoga for Health and Cycling (led by India) on 3/9/2019, Aerobic Exercise (led by Bhutan) on 4/9/2019 and Lodi Garden Walk (led by Thailand) on 5/9/2019. Three-minute physical activity sessions for the delegates were also organized in the afternoon under “Health for All theme” on each day of RC72.

Following side events were also held:

1. Side event on Public Health Achievements in the Region was held on 3/9/2019 in which six SEA Member States were felicitated for public health achievements. Sri Lanka was recognized for eliminating measles; Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Thailand for becoming the first four countries from the Region to control Hepatitis B; and Maldives for eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV and Syphilis.
2. A consultation with Member States on GPW13 Results Framework was held on 4/9/2019 where an overview of the GPW13 results framework, including updates and next steps was provided by Dr Samira Asma, ADG, WHO/HQ and Mr Mark Landry, Regional Adviser, WHO/SEARO. Inputs/comments were sought from Member States for finalization of the GPW13 Results Framework to be presented to the 146th session of the Executive Board to be held in 2020.
3. A Side event – “Moving NCD services from specialists to generalists, closer to the people through primary health care” was held on 5/9/2019. It was moderated by Dr Viroj Tangcharoensathien (Adviser to the Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand). Country experiences were shared by India, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Dr Vinod Paul (Member, NITI Aayog, Government of India) and Dr Pandup Tshering (Director-General, Ministry of Health, Bhutan) were the two experts invited for the side event.

4. The Side event on “Preparations for the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly (UNGA) on UHC” to be held on 23 September 2019 was organized on 5/9/2019. Dr Viroj Tangcharoensathien (Adviser to the Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand), Dr Ranieo Guerra (ADG, WHO Lead on UN high level meeting on UHC in WHO/HQ) and Dr Manisha Shridhar (Ag. Director, HSD/SEARO) gave an update to Member States on the UNGA including the draft political declaration and implications for the Region.

An information session was held on “Eat Right India” campaign of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), Government of India during lunch time on 5/9/2019. The campaign based on “food systems approach” and the two broad pillars of “Eat Healthy” and “Eat Safe” will highlight the concept of “Eat Right for Better Life”. It advocates collective effort by people and engagement of key stakeholders to make effective demand and supply-side interventions.

Dr Harsh Vardhan

**Minister of Health & Family Welfare,
Science & Technology and
Earth Sciences,
Government of India**