

Meeting of the national malaria programme managers on operationalizing the Ministerial Declaration on Accelerating and Sustaining Malaria Elimination in the South-East Asia Region on 11-12 March 2019

BACKGROUND NOTE

Significant progress has been made on malaria control towards elimination in the world as well as South-East Asia Region (SEAR) since 2010. Although the achievements have been remarkable, the progress appears to have stalled in certain geographical areas of the world between 2015 and 2017. According to the World Malaria Report 2018, the SEAR bears the second-highest global burden of malaria in terms of morbidity and mortality, and accounts for 56% of the global burden of *Plasmodium vivax*. An estimated 1.6 billion people remains at some risk of malaria in the SEAR, accounting for nearly half of the global at-risk population. Malaria is endemic in nine out of 11 countries of the region, accounting for nearly 70% of the burden outside the WHO African Region. Nearly 62% of the cases are due to *P. falciparum*. India and Indonesia accounted for 68% and 21% of the reported cases and 65% and 16% of malaria deaths, respectively. In spite of being the highest burden country of the region, India showed a 22 % decline in reported cases within a year.

The challenges facing the malaria response to achieve the fast-approaching GTS milestones for 2020 and 2025 are many and complex, including parasite resistance to antimalarial medicines and mosquito resistance to insecticides posing threats to progress, varying intervention coverage, surveillance and M&E, intermittent cross-border coordination and insufficient international and domestic funding.

In the SEAR, two Member States have been certified as malaria-free – Maldives and Sri Lanka; while three other Member States – Bhutan, Nepal, Timor Leste, have been identified as having the potential to eliminate malaria by 2020 (of 21 countries termed as “E-2020 countries” by WHO). All Member States of the Region have committed to malaria elimination by 2030 at the latest. Towards that end, high-level commitments have already been made by the SEAR Ministers of Health, notably in the 2017 *Ministerial Declaration on Accelerating and Sustaining Malaria Elimination in South-East Asia* and the 2018 *Ministerial Call for Action to Eliminate Malaria in the Greater Mekong Subregion before 2030*. In addition, the Regional Action Plan 2017–2030 towards 0. Malaria-Free South-East Asia Region was launched. In 2018, the WHO also released *An operational framework for cross-border collaboration for a malaria-free South-East Asia Region* during the 71st Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia drawing from a framework for a South-Asia subregional cross-border collaboration to eliminate malaria released in 2017.

Malaria does not respect national borders, which means that no country can achieve and sustain malaria elimination in isolation. Malaria in border areas and neighbouring nations poses a number of challenges. The challenges are multiplied by the enormous variation and complexity of the Region’s present malaria epidemiology, with many countries approaching elimination while others continue to have significant malaria burdens. Areas with high endemicity have a high potential for spread across borders, while some low endemicity areas have potential for outbreaks. Even in countries that had hitherto been malaria-free, there is an ever-present threat of re-establishment and resurgence. Health and other complementary social/welfare services along international borders are often weaker and more poorly staffed than in more central areas, in part because some of these areas may be chronically affected by security concerns and tensions. Moreover, many of the people living in border areas, especially in remote ones, are from socioeconomically vulnerable minorities, and disadvantaged in terms of access to health care & social services, and in many instances they lack citizenship rights. Timely epidemiological data on the malaria situation in border areas is typically weak or even absent altogether. There is very limited inter-country, cross-border cooperation and collaboration on malaria elimination, most so in sensitive border areas.

Both 2017 Ministerial Declaration and 2018 Ministerial Call for Action commit provision for universal access to quality-assured prompt malaria diagnosis and treatment as well as effective prevention in border areas and criticality of effective cross-border collaboration and complementary responses, amongst others. The commitments however, are still a long way away from being operational, including establishing functional cross-border collaborations, which are critical to reach a malaria-free SEAR.

The participants include: Programme managers and surveillance focal points from National Malaria Programmes from 11 Member States, representatives from partner organizations, viz. RBM Partnership to End Malaria, Asia Pacific Malaria Leaders Alliance (APLMA), MEOC Focal person for SEAR E2020 countries, APMEN, National Institute of Malaria Research India (WHO CC), select NGOs, besides experts and WHO technical & support staff from the South-East Asia Regional Office, Country Offices (SEAR), Western Pacific Regional Office, and HQ. The joint presence of the malaria programme managers, partners and technical experts at the same forum will facilitate effective communication on technical and policy areas, including cross-border collaboration.

The 2-day **meeting of the national malaria programme managers** is proposed to review the progress in malaria elimination efforts by Member States, discuss the commitments agreed upon in the “Ministerial Declaration on Accelerating and Sustaining Malaria Elimination in the South-East Asia Region” and their operationalization as well as sustaining malaria elimination to action, besides sharing of updates on the recent advances. The meeting thus, will be used as the platform to discuss the outcome of the agenda item on malaria elimination at the 71st Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia.

As a part of this meeting, a review of cross-border collaboration in the SEAR and the way forward is proposed in the backdrop of the WHO operational framework for cross-border collaboration. A panel discussion with participation by the experts, partner agencies and the WHO will focus on collaborations in terms of technical, resource mobilization and advocacy needs.

General objective

To strengthen collaboration and capacities to accelerate elimination of malaria towards a malaria-free South-East Asia Region by or before 2030.

Specific objectives

- a) To review progress with malaria elimination and prevention of reestablishment of malaria in the South-East Asia Region, including subnational elimination approaches and experiences from subregional malaria elimination networks;
- b) To update on new malaria policies, guidelines and strategies, and review recent advances made on these in the Region;
- c) To review and agree upon key country activities and a monitoring framework for operationalizing the “Ministerial Declaration on Accelerating and Sustaining Malaria Elimination in the South-East Asia Region”, and identify technical needs and resources;
- d) To review cross-border collaboration in the region and arrive at a consensus on the way forward.