



Written Statement Submission from The Task Force for Global Health, Inc.
Seventy-sixth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, New Delhi, India
Monday, 30 October to Thursday, 2 November 2023

Re: Agenda Item 8.1, *Regional Strategic Framework for sustaining, accelerating and innovating to end NTDs in the South-East Asia Region 2023–2030 (SEA/RC76/8)*

The Task Force for Global Health (TFGH), founded nearly 40 years ago to advance health equity, works with partners in more than 150 countries to eliminate diseases, ensure access to vaccines and essential medicines, and strengthen health systems to protect populations. TFGH is dedicated to eliminating neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) through drug donations, operational research, and fostering collaboration and partnership. TFGH programs align their work with the WHO NTD Roadmap; with continued investment, we are well on track to achieve and even surpass the goals for 2030. Success would mean not only ending these diseases of poverty, but also building capacity, improving access to healthcare, strengthening health systems, and achieving other sustainable development goals along the way.

We congratulate SEARO Member States and WHO leadership on the development of the “Regional Strategic Framework for sustaining, accelerating and innovating to end NTDs in the South-East Asia Region 2023–2030.” Countries in SEARO have been leaders in achieving the elimination of NTDs and can point to successes in the elimination of lymphatic filariasis, visceral leishmaniasis, trachoma, and yaws; nonetheless, much remains to be done: the framework document noted that the Southeast Asia Region still reports 59% of the world’s population requiring MDA for lymphatic filariasis and 66.5% of new cases of leprosy.

Improving measures toward universal health coverage is essential to making further progress against NTDs. This is because NTDs are diseases of poverty, often impacting the most underserved, hard to reach and impoverished populations. We, therefore, urge WHO and SEARO Member States to not only ensure that UHC goals and objectives prioritize services for neglected tropical diseases, but that they also consider evaluating UHC effectiveness by its ability to reach those affected by these diseases. These diseases impact the hardest to reach and most impoverished, and should therefore be considered as key indicators when determining the coverage of and access to comprehensive health services.

Fully functioning NTD programs include a range of services from prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, to long term care and psychosocial support. This aligns with SEARO’s universal health coverage approach that is holistic and people centered, focusing on physical as well as mental well-being. This is particularly important for NTDs that target already marginalized populations who then often suffer from further stigma and exclusion as a result of their disease. We at the Task Force for Global Health also understand the importance of a comprehensive and holistic approach to health services and strive to deliver interventions in a manner reflecting genuine respect and concern for the broader well-being of the people we serve.

The TFGH stands ready to support SEARO in its work to control and eliminate NTDs, strengthen the scientific evidence base through research and innovation, and to work alongside countries to support sustainable, country-led success.