Giving blood is a uniquely powerful act. As the theme of this year’s World Blood Donor Day – ‘Be there for someone else. Give blood. Share life’ – emphasizes, giving blood is a simple way to save a life, at the same time as demonstrating the solidarity, altruism, empathy and kindness that most of us strive to practice each and every day.

Nevertheless, the solidarity and altruism blood donors demonstrate is – in the final analysis – only as powerful as the blood and blood product systems that collect, process, disseminate, store and transfuse their blood.

To this end, Member countries across the South-East Asia Region have made significant progress in scaling up implementation of the WHO global strategy for safe blood. All Member countries have now developed and are implementing national policies on blood transfusion and blood safety. Region-wide, all blood donated is tested for the potential of transfusion-transmitted infections. Remarkably, 82% of the blood collected in the Region is from voluntary, non-remunerated donors – a strong indication of the potential for further gains.

As always, however, there is room for improvement. Three areas stand out.

First, all Member countries can significantly enhance the efficiency with which they process and distribute blood products by carrying out detailed planning and needs assessments. Where they aren’t already, centralized blood banks responsible for the collection, processing and distribution of blood should be designated as a matter of priority, while the volume of blood needed to cover specific catchment areas should be accurately evaluated. As part of this, blood storage centers – including primary health care facilities – should be allocated and reliable supply systems established. Doing so will ensure blood products are readily available to communities in remote and hard-to-reach areas.

Second, stronger haemovigilance – from donation to processing, and from storage to transfusion – will ensure Member countries have seamless blood product systems in place. Specifically, Member countries should ensure haemovigilance measures are reported to the WHO Global Database on Blood Donor Safety, with a particular focus on ensuring all private and public facilities do the same. Similarly, they should also work to harness laboratory technology to guarantee the highest quality screening possible is carried out.

And finally, despite the need for more blood (at present around 15.9 million units of blood are collected Region-wide annually, with an estimated 18 million units required), Member countries should make concerted efforts to limit the need for blood products in the first place. The best way to do that is by providing high-quality essential services at the primary level, including attentive antenatal care, sharp-eyed disease screening and diagnosis, and effective health promotion and counselling as a matter of routine.

Though giving blood may be a simple way to save a life, strengthening the systems that collect, process, disseminate, store and transfuse blood is also a potent means of fortifying health systems more generally. That, in turn, will advance progress towards a goal for which WHO South-East Asia and its Member countries are all striving for: access to essential health services for all.
June 14 is observed as World Blood Donor Day globally. The global community shares one common life-source... blood. Bhutan also joins the global community on this special day, with the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization and Bank of Bhutan, spearheading advocacy and awareness activities to observe the day.

The global focus this year is on blood donation as an action of solidarity with the theme “Be there for someone else” and the secondary message: “Give Blood. Share Life”. It highlights the fundamental human values of altruism, respect, empathy and kindness which sustains voluntary unpaid blood donation systems. It also aims highlight the stories of people whose lives have been saved through blood donation, as a way of motivating regular blood donors to continue giving blood and to encourage people in good health who have never given blood to begin doing so, particularly young people. The objective of the campaign of this year is to draw attention to the roles that voluntary donation systems play in encouraging people to care for one another and generate social ties and a united community.

While recognizing the silent and unsung heroes who save lives every day by donating blood, the Ministry of Health also strongly encourages more people to donate blood voluntarily and regularly. Regular voluntary blood donors are the safest source of blood, as there is fewer blood borne infections among these donors than among people who donate for family members / friends. Thus, blood collection from voluntary non-remunerated blood donors is the cornerstone of a safe and sufficient blood supply.

According to WHO, 62 of the 194 Member States collect 100% of their blood supply from voluntary non-remunerated blood donors. Bhutan has currently achieved 77% blood donations from voluntary non-remunerated blood donors. Bhutan remains committed in reaching 100% voluntary non-remunerated blood donors by 2020.

Bhutan has been experiencing substantial impact of chronic non-communicable diseases that are well-recognized emerging public health problems and few of these like chronic kidney and liver disease and cancers are blood transfusion dependent which ultimately has led to increase in the requirement of blood. Bhutan is already experiencing an increase in the road traffic accident emergencies. The continued demand of blood in conditions like pregnancy and child birth-related complications add to this burden. Thus, every single person can help others in such situations, by giving the valuable gift of blood. It is therefore, important to give blood regularly, so that the blood stock is sufficient before an emergency arises.

I take this opportunity to thank the Bank of Bhutan and the World Health Organization for their continued support year after year in observing this noble day. The Ministry of Health would also like to congratulate the Bank of Bhutan on their 50th Anniversary and wish them prosperity and success in the coming years.

The Ministry would like to extend its sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to all the blood donors, blood donor organizations and motivators for their contribution to saving the lives of many patients. On this special occasion, the Ministry would like to urge you to continue this noble act of volunteerism.

Thanking You