TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

Assignment period – 3 December 2006 – 17 May 2007

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WHO Project: ICP CPC 222
1. **Terms of reference**

Under the supervision of Director, CDS and RA-LEP:

(1) To provide technical support to member countries of SEA in their programmes of LF, STH and other diseases targeted for eradication/elimination and coordinate implementation of elimination strategies:

(2) To monitor and evaluate the progress of LF elimination programmes in endemic countries, liaise with HQ and partners for resource mobilization, organize meetings of the Regional Programme Review Group for LFE as required, prepare write-ups on progress of programme activities as may be necessary;

(3) To provide appropriate technical advice to member countries in the implementation of the National Plans for Prevention and Control of Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) support advocacy initiatives to obtain continued political commitment from the Member Governments in the Region to control the disease and in adopting an integrated approach to control the disease at national and sub-national levels, and liaise with HQ and partners for resource mobilization for the programme.

Perform any other duties as given by Director, CDS and RA-LEP.

2. **Brief summary of activities carried out during the assignment**

The STP (Dr V. Kumaraswami) carried out the following activities during assignment:

### 2.1 Lymphatic Filariasis Elimination activities

The STP assisted RA-LEP in coordinating Mass Drug Administration (MDA) implementation activities of MDA in member countries. He reviewed the reports submitted by countries at the last Programme Managers meeting and the Regional Programme Managers Meeting. In consultation with the RA he sought details from member countries regarding implementation activities. These included clarifications regarding the number of implementation units, target population sizes, coverage attained during the MDA. Since the baseline data and the sentinel and spot-check site data after each round were not available in some areas these were requested from the countries to ensure completeness of data. Similarly, details about the disability alleviation programme were secured.

He assisted RA-LEP in the preparation of the forthcoming meetings to be held at Yangon, Myanmar that will play an important role in guiding the success of the Elimination Programme in the region.

- National LF Programme Managers meeting, 9-11 July 2007
- Fourth Regional Programme Review Group Meeting 11-12 July 2007

Preparatory activities included organization of the planning meetings, developing the agenda and finalizing the documents to be distributed at the meetings.

In consultation with the RA finalized the following documents for distribution at the forthcoming meetings:

- Report of the Third Regional Programme Review Group Meeting held at Jakarta
- Regional Strategic Plan (2007-2011) for the Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis
The STP also assisted countries in preparing their applications for Albendazole. In some cases information regarding the number of tablets of Albendazole had to be revised in the light of information that was provided in response to queries sought by the STP.

The STP worked closely with the WHO Headquarters on technical and funding issues. He assisted the efforts of programme in Nepal to secure the drugs for its next round of drug distribution. In 2006, India switched to a two-drug policy and in its re-application sought over 500 million tablets of Albendazole for its next round. The STP in consultation with the RA and Headquarters assessed the steps required to procure this large quantity and provided both the country and WHO Hq information regarding the inputs required for this rapid scale-up.

The successful completion of five rounds of MDA by Sri Lanka was a major achievement. Details about the factors that contributed to the success of the programme were sought so that the success story of the country can be shared by other countries in the region and also used as an advocacy tool.

The STP provided inputs to the formulation of guidelines for the prevention and alleviation of disabilities associated with lymphatic filariasis being developed by HQ. In addition he provided technical advice on the formulation of similar models in the endemic countries of the Region.

2.2 Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) and other Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD)

The STP assisted the Unit in providing technical assistance to countries in implementing strategies for de-worming. In association with Headquarters assisted the programme in Bhutan to secure funding for the continuation of the de-worming activities.

He assisted the RA in organizing and also participated in the Second Meeting of Partners on Tropical Diseases targeted for Elimination-Eradication, 14-15 February 2007, held at Jakarta, Indonesia. The meeting was organized to review progress in programmes related to the targeted diseases and to develop mechanisms for strengthening partnerships and collaboration in order to promote advocacy for the targeted diseases. STP assisted in the preparation of the presentation made by the RA on the current status of the LF situation in the Region and the progress made by the LF elimination Programme in the Region and assisted the RA in the compilation of the statements made by the Partners.

He also participated and assisted the RA in organizing the National Review Meeting on Yaws Eradication at Jakarta, Indonesia on 15 February 2007. The meeting reviewed the progress of Yaws Eradication in Indonesia, identified constraints and identified ways and means of intensifying efforts and in addition the National Strategic Plan of Indonesia was discussed and actions for acceleration of efforts were determined.

He represented SEARO at the meeting of the Scientific Working Group (SWG) on Helminth Initiative organized by TDR / WHO in collaboration with the University of Tokyo on 22-24 January 2007 and provided useful inputs during the post presentation and plenary discussions on drug development for lymphatic filariasis and other helminths, on issues pertaining to development of resistance and in the formulation of some of the general recommendations made, particularly from the WHO perspective.

The STP represented SEARO at the WHO Ad Hoc Strategic and Technical Advisory Group Meeting (STAG) on Neglected Tropical Diseases, WHO/HQ Geneva, held on 17-18 April 2007. At the meeting he provided inputs regarding the activities, initiatives, progress and the and the advocacy efforts of the Regional Office for the control/elimination of NTDs including the recent Second Partners Meeting on Tropical Diseases held at Jakarta in February and also contributed to the formulation of the recommendations of the meeting.
He represented SEARO at the Global Partners' Meeting on Neglected Tropical Diseases, WHO/HQ, Geneva, held on 19-20 April 2007 organized to enhance cooperation among ongoing and new partnerships and global initiatives and promote the concept of control of NTDS and its integration with other large-scale interventions. The STP served as the rapporteur for the group that discussed intensified delivery.

2.3 Monitoring and evaluation

The STP served as a member of the Joint Monitoring Mission organized by WHO and the Government of India to review the performance, implementation measures and plans of the National Vector Borne Diseases Control Programme and recommend the steps needed to sustain and further improve the programme in order to be able to make good progress towards achieving the goals of National Health Policy as well as Millennium Development Goal by the target period. The STP was chosen as the Chairman of the group that evaluated the lymphatic filariasis component of the programme. The team reviewed documents, met the state health officials and administrators and conducted site visits in Andhra Pradesh to assess programme performance. Based on its observations the team made several recommendations to improve the performance of the programme covering programme policy, MDA implementation, disability alleviation expansion, logistics and operational research.

He coordinated with RA the collection of the annual reports of the countries and updating the database used to monitor the performance of country programmes for the elimination of lymphatic filariasis in the Region. This included assessment of completeness and accuracy of data and providing feedback to the countries as well as the Global Programme at Headquarters. Utilizing the share point site created by HQ he monitored the performance of the programme in the Region and identified the bottlenecks in the supply of Albendazole to member countries.

2.4 Other activities

- Assisted the RA in finalizing the following documents for printing:
  - Report of the Third Regional Programme Review Group Meeting held at Jakarta
  - Regional Strategic Plan (2007-2011) for the Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis
  - Report of the Second Meeting of Partners on Tropical Diseases targeted for Elimination-Eradication
  - Report on the Seminar on Leprosy Elimination
- Made a presentation at the technical seminar on “Integrating health services: the experience from Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)” organized by the Department on 4 May 2007. STP-NTD highlighted the heavy socioeconomic burden on countries, the common features of NTDs, examples of successful cost effective control, the opportunities for integration with other programmes and the challenges such as compliance, drug interactions, emergence of drug resistance and overburdening of health systems and most importantly ensuring community participation and ownership to ensure sustainability.
- Served as a facilitator at the retreat of the Professional staff of the Department of Communicable Diseases WHO/SEARO from 11-13 May 2007.
- Participated in the Brainstorming session on Vector Borne Diseases held on March 8 2007
- Assisted RA-LEP in discussions and in the formulation of the proposal for the establishment of a Course on Tropical Diseases at NICD, New Delhi
- Evaluated research proposals submitted for the small grant programme of TDR
3. Recommendations

The SEAR has the highest burden of lymphatic filariasis. The success of the LF elimination programme in the Region will be critical for the overall success of the Global Programme for Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis. The following challenges need to be overcome to ensure success:

- Interruption of transmission can be achieved only if high coverages (>85%) are sustained for at least 5 years. Current coverage rates in some countries are below this level. Programmes should consider maximizing consumption of drugs in the MDA programme under supervisory administration (ideally using DOT strategy) and enforce inbuilt and independent assessments of compliance.
- Although there is a surfeit of IEC activities on the ground they have not been evaluated and their impact has not been assessed. WHO should assist National programmes in reviewing and redesigning BCC involving social marketing experts to develop key messages.
- Although MDA activities have been implemented at many sites the second component of the programme is yet roll out. Assistance should be provided to countries in accelerating implementation. Programmes need to consider providing adequate training, provider incentives, outsourcing and public-private partnership and NGO participation (e.g. former leprosy units).
- Drug shortages are a major challenge. The sudden increase in demand for donated Albendazole due to policy change and a rapid scale up in the Region has stressed the capacity of the donor agency. WHO and the countries need to develop plans for scaling up and engage in discussion with the donor company to ensure the smooth flow of Albendazole for the programme. Shortages of DEC are also common especially with the rapid scaling up of programmes and the limited production capacity for the drug in some countries of the Region. WHO needs to assist countries in procuring adequate DEC by exploring donations and increasing capacity in the Region.
- Vector control activities for the LF programme are restricted to urban areas under the FCU and the UMS. The resources for these activities are grossly inadequate. Programmes should harmonize all vector control measures using integrated vector management.
- Sri Lanka recently successfully completed five rounds of MDA and has brought down mf levels significantly. The criteria for certifying elimination should be developed for the Region and evaluated.
- Monitoring and evaluation is currently done within the programme and there are insufficient resources for the conduct of the prescribed activities. Adequate resources for Monitoring and evaluation activities should be provided and independent agencies like Medical Colleges, Research Institutes and Universities should be involved.
- Currently there are is no operational research to support the programme to address key issues arising during programme implementation. Research Institutes and Universities may be utilized to address questions in implementation in MDA. Capacity building efforts within programmes to carry out operational research need to be strengthened.
- LF elimination in Sri Lanka should be documented as an example of a success story.
4. **NTDs**

- Several opportunities exist for integration of services in programmes that target the NTDs. These should be exploited and scaled up to optimize utilization of resources and increasing efficiency.
- Almost all programmes targeting NTDs are short of funds. Efforts should be strengthened to attract funding by recruiting more partners and donors.

5. **Acknowledgements**

The STP would like to thank CDS for providing a fine working environment and his constant encouragement and support. He would also like to acknowledge the support received from the coordinators and all the professional and general staff of the Department during the assignment. Finally, he would like to thank the senior management for providing this opportunity to serve WHO/SEARO.