Think tank meeting on “Revisiting the strategies for intervention among Key populations for HIV

WHO Regional Office for South-Asia organised a high level leadership meeting bringing global experts to revisit the strategies for Interventions among Key populations for HIV from 12-13 February 2018 at SEARO, New Delhi. The overall objective of this meeting was to strengthen the AIDS response in the context of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), by intensifying the focus on Key populations and leveraging ‘AIDS Assets’ in leaving no one behind.

A key takeaway from the meeting was that, despite the achievements made in the control of the AIDS epidemic in Asia, unless there was renewed attention to addressing the issues of HIV transmission among and outwards from the key populations, the overall global goals of ending the AIDS epidemic would not be achieved, and there can be a risk of rise in new HIV infections.

The recommendations from this leadership meeting will guide WHO, other UN agencies, donors, communities and other partners in re-aligning HIV programmes to reach those ‘left behind’ in the context of UHC; and to increase the efficiency, responsiveness and uptake of HIV services with a focus on Key Populations.

Key Highlights:

1. More than 60 experts, partners, donors, civil society and key population have participated in the meeting. The WHO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, Global Fund, research institutions, academics, economists, modeling experts, civil society, community based organization, and representatives from Key population came together to discuss the current scenario of intervention among Key population and challenges behind Key population

2. No one should be left behind under Universal Health Coverage and we are obligated to focus on those who are most likely to be vulnerable, marginalized and in the greatest need, said by Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, WHO-SEAR in her inaugural address to gargantuan audience

3. The meeting revisited the 2008 AIDS Commission in Asia and the progress made so far (a decade of experience in implementation) and challenges behind the AIDS community in the form of emerging epidemics across the region and high rise in selected pockets in every country
4. The experts provided the new strategies and inputs beyond their organization and institutions with passion and commitment to make the Key population agenda as “Priority”, with detailed background papers written by six thematic groups providing the background for meaningful discussion among the experts. The draft recommendations were presented and discussed with the participants

5. Based on the evidence and experiences presented, it is evident that, two third of new infections are still contributing by Key population and unless the AIDS community controls the epidemic among Key population the elimination agenda is non-achievable in the near future

6. The experts echoed that the investment needs to be front-loaded to comprehend the expected results and highlighted that the Key population funding is still driven by internal funding rather finding a sustainable solution of domestic funding source

7. The countries need to be prioritized, key population to be prioritized and reversal of epidemics among key populations to be prioritized. It is recommended to go ahead with recommendations as “ready” “steady” “go” approach

This meeting reaffirmed that the Key population remains a priority, and that the response needs to move to local level, keeping community organizations at the centre of it. Also, a paradigm shift to local response is essential in prioritization of interventions, addressing a bottom up need of estimation, resource flow, data for local action and emphasized accountability and audit of Key population programme.