Although Sri Lanka has reached near elimination levels in Malaria and Lymphatic Filariasis, Dengue and Leishmaniasis continue to be a challenge. In line with this year’s World Health Day theme, Vector Borne Diseases, a series of events were initiated from 1 April 2014 which will extend to the end of the year and beyond. The main aim being the campaign was to educate the masses that control of vector breeding is a community responsibility rather than that of the Ministry of Health alone.

A week long period of intense advocacy campaigns began on 1st April with a seminar on Prevention & Control of Vector Borne Diseases – “Intersectoral Collaboration for Integrated Vector management” which was followed by a media conference. Hon. Minister of Health participated as the Chief Guest and representatives from the Presidential Taskforce, relevant ministries, stakeholders and media personnel also were part at this event which was supported by WHO.

The period from 2 – 8 April 2014 was very appropriately declared a “Mosquito Control Week” by the Ministry of Health. A series of nationwide activities were conducted with the participation of government and non-government organizations, general public and school children.

On 3 April 2014, Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) organized a symposium on Vector Borne Diseases (VBD) with the collaboration of Ministry of Health. Representatives from Control Programmes of VBDs, researchers and academics made presentations at this symposium. This event too was supported by WHO.

As customary, WHO Country Office for Sri Lanka hosted a reception to mark World Health Day. Hon. Minister of Health, two ex-Ministers of Health, Secretary Health, high ranking officials of the Ministry of Health, Directors & staff of the Control Programmes of Vector Borne Diseases, Diplomats, UN Agency Heads, Developmental Partner Heads and other dignitaries graced this occasion. A number of thematic plays by a professional theatre/drama company and students of the Medical Faculty of the University of Colombo was a feature of the evening which was attended by nearly 250 invitees. The opportunity was also seized by the WHO Representative to Sri Lanka, Dr Firdosi Rustom Mehta to present the Polio Free Certification of the South-East Asia Region to the Hon. Minister of Health, Mr Maithripala Sirisena.
On 9 April, a Media Seminar for all print and electronic media was held at the Health Education Bureau. The WHO Representative to Sri Lanka, Director General of Health Services and Directors of VBD Control Programmes and local experts spoke. This media seminar too was supported by WHO.

A number of other initiatives have been lined up for the rest of the year which includes a 30 minute slot at all Sri Lanka Medical Association’s (SLMA) monthly regional meetings for VBD Control Programmes. The first meeting will be held in Polonnaruwa District on 25th April. WCO will support VBD Control Programmes for their participation at selected regional meetings.

Furthermore, a seminar/symposium on VBD has been included in the Annual Scientific Sessions of the SLMA which is to be held in July and the Annual Scientific Sessions of the College of Community Physicians which is to be held in September this year. These activities too will be supported by WHO.

A WHO supported external evaluation of the dengue control programme is to be held in August 2014.

The battle against vector borne diseases is not restricted for a day or year but will continue throughout with the continued support of WHO...