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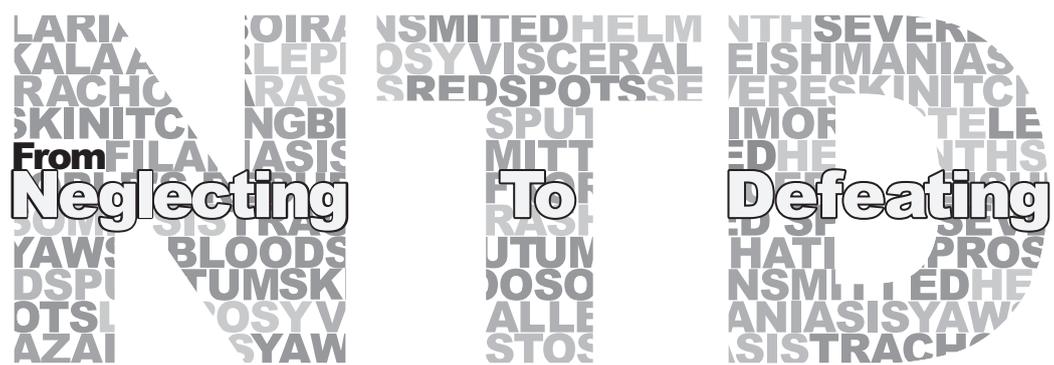
Regional Office for South-East Asia

From **Neglecting** To **Defeating**

Neglected Tropical Diseases

In WHO South-East Asia Region





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*“Through my flagship on elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases we bring those neglected and worst affected to the front of the queue, ensuring Universal Health Coverage truly benefits people left behind”.*

*- Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director*



# FOREWORD

Neglected tropical diseases include some of the oldest and most debilitating and stigmatizing diseases, affecting the poorest of the communities in the developing world. Being diseases of the poor who are hidden in the remote rural villages or overlooked urban slums, these diseases had long been forgotten and largely neglected.

However, in the recent past we have seen a major change in the NTD landscape. By bringing this diverse group of diseases under the umbrella of NTDs, WHO played an important advocacy and catalytic role in generating a renewed interest, commitment and support to eradicate, eliminate and control them. Much has been done to accelerate progress towards the control, elimination and eradication of NTDs over the last decade.

More recently, the Sustainable Development Goals also provided an effective framework for successful elimination of NTDs. SDGs emphasize the interrelated nature of health and development and encourage a broad, multidimensional approach that is essential to uproot NTDs, whose persistence is related to a variety of biological and social factors. Importantly, the SDG framework ensures that our commitment to leaving no one behind outlasts these targets, and stimulates a mindset attuned to the needs of the society's most vulnerable.

The WHO South-East Asia Region, home to one fourth of the world's population, carries the second highest burden of NTDs globally. Every country in the Region is endemic to at least one of the 18 NTDs. We are also fully committed to the time-bound elimination of NTDs endemic in our Region. With strong support and commitment from leaders of our Member States, we have made this a regional health priority and a Flagship Programme of the WHO Regional Office. By bringing those marginalized to the front of the queue, we are committed to see that no one is left behind. And we want to see our future generations leading a healthy and economically productive life, free from these debilitating conditions.

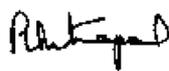
We have made significant progress in the achievement of these NTD targets. In 2016, India became the first country to be verified and formally acknowledged to have eliminated yaws and achieving

yaws-free status. In the same year Maldives and Sri Lanka have been validated for elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem. Thailand and Bangladesh are under post-MDA surveillance for LF. Nepal has maintained the kala-azar elimination target of less than 1 per 10 000 populations at the subnational level for three consecutive years. We achieved the target of bringing down the prevalence of leprosy to less than one case per 10 000 populations at the Regional level in the year 2000 and at the national level in all Member States by the year 2005.

Although we have made good progress, the job is far from being done. While efforts to overcome existing operational and programmatic challenges continue, new and emerging issues are being noted as some of the programmes enter into the last mile of elimination. The Region continues to report a large number of leprosy cases. In 2015, the Region contributed 74% of the global new leprosy cases and 75% of the new child leprosy cases reported to WHO. Failure to achieve the desired outcome and sustain the low transmission in several districts that have completed MDA is being observed as an emerging challenge in the Region. Some of the elimination programmes are at risk of missing the target. These are related to management and operational barriers with some limitation on the available tools.

We must be creative to see through these challenges and emerge with fresh thinking and innovative ideas to accelerate progress towards NTD elimination in the Region. The Region is committed to work together to achieve its time-bound targets on NTDs through the implementation of poverty reduction and other Sustainable Development Goals. NTD elimination is an important yardstick to measure the quality and efficacy of this investment. Bringing those neglected ahead in the queue through the elimination of NTDs will only accelerate the progress towards of universal health coverage.

We thank the strong partnership we have and the support we receive from donors, including the pharmaceutical industry. We hope that this partnership would grow stronger and the generous support would increase further to enable us to reach our targets sooner.



**Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh**

Regional Director



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