

**India-Bhutan Program Director
Level Bilateral Virtual Meeting
for Cross-border Malaria
Elimination-Meeting Report**

6th September 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South East Asia Regional Coordination Mechanism Forum (SRCMF) organised its 1st Indo-Bhutan National Malaria Program Director level bilateral virtual meeting for Cross-border Malaria elimination on 6th September 2021. The meeting was initially chaired by Dr Neeraj Dhingra, Director of NVBDCP & leader of the Indian delegation and later continued by Dr. Avdhesh Kumar, Additional Director NVBDCP, MOH&FW, Govt. of India. The Bhutanese delegation was led by Dr Tandin Dorji, Director, Department of Public Health (DoPH), MOH Royal Govt. of Bhutan. The GF SEA Constituency, Communication Focal Point (CFP) and Coordinator of CCM Bhutan, and India CCM Coordinator representative also attended the meeting.

Meeting started with welcome address by Dr. Jigmi Singay, Executive secretary, SRCMF Secretariat. This was followed by introductory opening remarks from both leaders of the delegation - by Dr. Neeraj Dhingra, the leader of the Indian delegation and followed by Dr Mr. Tandin Dorji, Delegation leader from Bhutan.

In the Indo-Bhutan border for Malaria elimination, Indian delegation presented a total of 9 districts - Tawang, West kameng, Udalguri, Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and East District along the International Border from respective 4 States – Arunachal, Assam, West Bengal and Sikkim were identified on the map and confirmed in the meeting. Further, a 5 km Corridor from the International border on both sides was also proposed as the Cross-Border area for implementation of activities and facilities and in the respective districts as required. Following which the meeting proceeded with deliberations on Identification and finalization of activities for synchronized implementation and strengthening information and data sharing and sharing names of the focal/contact point at local, district and state level. Discussion were also held on budget, Implementation and M&E and frequency of the next onsite bilateral meeting. The details are given in the main body of the report.

The Executive Secretary cum Coordinator of the SRCMF Secretariat, appraised the meeting on the Grant CFP-UNOPS-RBM-2020-002 awarded to SRCMF by UNOPS/RBM and how it is being implemented through partnership in achieving the malaria elimination in the Cross-border area of the SEA sub- region.

This Indo-Bhutan Program Director level bilateral virtual Meeting for Cross-border Malaria Elimination is in line with the with the 4th SRCMF meeting recommendation and is the 1st Bilateral

meeting which will be followed by Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bangladesh bilateral meetings under the same project CFP-UNOPS-RBM-2021-02

The meeting, after deliberating on all the agenda items and reiterating full support to SRCMF Secretariat by both the countries for the Coordination of regional and sub-regional activities and other mandates was formally declared closed at 11.30 AM IST by the Chairperson.

Opening Remarks

This Bilateral Indo-Bhutan meeting organized by SRCMF Secretariat on 06 September '21 at 9.30am IST. on Cross-Border Malaria Elimination is a follow up of the 4th SRCMF (South East Asia Regional Coordination Mechanism Forum) meeting recommendation held on 28th July 2021.

The meeting started with welcome address by Dr Jigmi Singay, Executive Secretary cum Coordinator, SRCMF Secretariat, He extended warm welcome to the distinguished and eminent Delegates - from India lead by Dr Neeraj Dhingra, Director, NVBDCP, MOHFW, Govt. of India and Bhutan lead by Mr Tandin Dorji, Director, Dept. of Public Health, MOH, Royal Govt. of Bhutan, GF SEA Constituency Communication Focal Point (CFP) and Coordinator CCM Bhutan, India CCM Coordinator representative and SRCMF Secretariat Staff and all other participants, who attended this Bilateral Meeting in spite of their busy schedule. He informed the meeting that this Indo-Bhutan virtual meeting is organized pursuant to the recommendation of the 4th SRCMF virtual Meeting held on 28 July 2021. He also informed that this is the 1st bilateral meeting organized by SRCMF Secretariat under the project CFP-UNOPS-RBM-2021-02. He then highlighted the objectives and outcomes of the Indo-Bhutan Program Director level bilateral meeting for cross-border malaria elimination to the audiences. While once again offering his warm and hearty welcome to both the delegations, all the participants also thanked everybody and wished the meeting all success in its deliberations.

Appointment of Chair

The Session started with Executive Secretary cum Coordinator, SRCMF Secretariat proposing Dr Avdhesh Kumar, Additional Director NVBDCP, MOH&FW, Govt. of India, for the Chairperson for the Indo-Bhutan Program Directors bilateral meeting. The proposal was seconded by Mr Tandin Dorji, Director, Department of Public Health, MOH, Bhutan—Dr. Avdhesh Kumar was elected as the Chairperson of the meeting. The delegation members from India and Bhutan then introduced themselves to the meeting including the CFP, CCM coordinators and Secretariat staff.

Dr Jigmi Singay formally invited and handed over the Chairmanship to Dr. Avdhesh Kumar.

On the request of the Chair and with endorsement of the meeting, Dr Neeraj Dhingra, Director, NVBDCP Chaired the initial part of the meeting till the time he had to leave to attend another important emergency meeting.

Business Session

1. Current ongoing activities at the Cross-Border area for malaria elimination and areas for strengthening

Introductory Comments

Dr. Neeraj Dhingra welcomed distinguished delegation from Bhutan and highlighted that the bilateral meetings have been ongoing for a number of years and now we need to have an effective coordination mechanism at the local level for implementing the strategies for cross-border malaria elimination. He also stressed the importance of developing and strengthening mechanism for district coordination on both the sides of the international border for sustaining the elimination activities. He added that the current WhatsApp group was doing excellent work in sharing information between both sides but it needs further strengthening to track the progress towards elimination and to drive timely action on both sides. He stressed on the need to have a very good surveillance system and regular monitoring and evaluation of the program to track the progress to zero “0” transmission of cases. He assured that malaria elimination target is within reach and achievable in our region as two countries have already done it.

Lastly Dr Dhingra reiterated the importance for strengthening information and data sharing through formal and informal mechanism, timely intervention and joint action on both sides, reinforced by field visits on either side of the international border.

Dr. Tandin Dorji highlighted also the need for strengthening coordination mechanism at the local level for cross-border malaria elimination. As a follow-up to the previous two rounds of the Indo-Bhutan meeting coordinated by GoI/Bhutan in 2019 and 2020, Bhutan has mapped the health facilities, districts along Indo-Bhutan international border and also identified district focal points and this information has been already shared with NVBDCP.

During the discussion the following points were deliberated:

1. Lack of Effective coordination mechanism at the local level for implementing the strategies for cross-border malaria elimination;

2. Need for strengthening information and data sharing through formal and informal mechanism for joint and timely intervention;
3. Mapping of the health facilities in the cross-border areas and districts along international border;
4. Status of Executive order to be issued by the respective ministries to states and district for carrying out joint activities at cross border areas.

The following agreements have been reached after the deliberations of the above issues:

1. Mapping to be conducted/updated of the health facilities in the districts along international border for joint planning, implementation of activities, interventions and timely response for malaria elimination in the cross-border area.
2. Bhutan to share again the draft Executive order with NVBDCP for reviewing, getting approval for issuing Executive orders from the Central ministry to states and district for carrying out joint activities in the cross-border areas
3. Strengthen and enhance the use of WhatsApp group to track the progress towards elimination and to take action on both sides as it has been found to be useful for the program

Recommendations for:

National Programs

- a) Mapping/ updating of maps of the health facilities, program planning, implementation and operation of activities for cross border malaria elimination, exchange of information and data sharing will be within 5 KM radius from the international border and the adjacent districts
- b) Respective National Malaria Control Programs on both sides of the international border will process with their respective Health Ministry and get Executive Order issued to the States, Districts and local Governments, for formal implementation of these agreed joint and synchronized strategies and activities for the Indo-Bhutan Cross-Border Malaria Elimination.
- c) Strengthen, facilitate and increase where required WhatsApp group to track the progress towards elimination and for timely action on both sides
- d) Establish appropriate mechanism for cross border collaboration for district and State level coordination

SRCMF Secretariat

- a) Facilitate coordination and collaboration mainly at program and local level particularly for those activities which needs joint planning and synchronized implementation of activities for Malaria Elimination at the Cross-Border areas and districts.
- b) Similar Coordination mechanism has to be facilitated at the Districts and State level.
- c) Facilitate follow up of the meetings with the National Program authorities.
- d) Initiate discussions with the National programs of the Member States and finalize the types of information and data to be shared through the Website.
- e) Most of the future Coordination Meetings for the Cross Border Areas has to be organized at the site (Field level) so that participants can observe the field situation on both the sides.

2. To confirm the border districts and Cross-border areas adjoining the international border for Malaria elimination in Cross-border area

Introductory Comments

In the Indo-Bhutan border for Malaria elimination, Indian delegation presented a total of 9 districts - Tawang, West kameng, Udalguri, Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and East District along the International Border from respective 4 States – Arunachal, Assam, West Bengal and Sikkim were identified on the map and confirmed in the meeting

India is in process of doing the mapping exercise and will share detailed information on cross border specific area post the mapping exercise. He further added that Since Bhutan is moving toward malaria elimination, he reassured India's support to achieve Bhutan's elimination target by implementing all the required activities required for malaria elimination on India side. He further proposed 5kms corridor along international border to be defined as the cross-border area for collaboration for malaria elimination.

From Bhutan Dr Tobgye thanked India for the generous support and its efforts in collaborating with Bhutan in achieving malaria elimination. Bhutan welcomes the proposal of 5kms corridor being identifies for cross-border collaboration and added that it will make a difference and encourage joint implementation of cross-border interventions at border and help achieve 2030 malaria elimination targets for both the countries. He further added that most of the health facilities and districts mapped by Bhutan in border areas fall within 5kms radius.

During the discussion the following points were deliberated:

1. COVID-19 Pandemic impact on Health services in general and Malaria in particular.

The 2nd Covid-19 wave had major impact on malaria activities, surveillance, logistics and supply due to the lockdown, travel restrictions and diversions of human resources to covid-19 relief.

2. SRCMF has initiated desk review of covid-19 impact on malaria program and the report will be presented in the next SRCMF meeting.
3. proposed 5kms corridor along international border to be defined as the cross-border area for collaboration for malaria elimination.

The meeting agreed from the above discussions on following issues:

- proposed 5 KM Corridor to be followed on both sides of the international border as the cross-border area for collaboration at the program level.

Recommendations for:

National Programs

- The proposed 5 KM Corridor to be followed on both sides of the international border as the cross-border area for collaboration and for undertaking implementation of all joint activities for cross border malaria elimination
- update and share list of focal points for malaria elimination program at all the local, district, state and National level.

SRCMF Secretariat

- facilitate coordination and collaboration mainly at program and local level for joint planning of synchronised implementation for malaria elimination at cross border area;
- to share report of the covid-19 impact review and study on malaria program in next SRCMF meeting.

a) Identification and finalization of activities for synchronized implementation

Introductory Comments

LLIN saturation in north east states in India happens in one lot. India suggested that as per the policy of the country can consider 5 kilometres zone on either side of the international border for LLIN saturation. In India LLIN distribution happens after 3-3.5 years. Next distribution in North Indian states will happen in 2023. Regarding IRS in North eastern states of India, the 1st Round happens in February-March, before the onset of monsoon and 2nd round corresponds to 2nd peak of the monsoon. Regarding Treatment in North eastern states for PF case ACT AL is used and for PV -CQ +PQ is used.

Discussion on the above agenda covered following areas

- Bhutan submitted that it will be helpful to have information on dates, timing and coverage on LLIN distribution and IRS for synchronised implementation and local actions.
- Bhutan's next mass distribution of LLINS, will also happen in 2023, in the same year as in India.
- For IRS the first round takes place in March and 2nd round in August and September.
- Regarding treatment, Bhutan is also using same treatment regimens as India.
- Bhutan highlighted with 5 km radius defined as cross border area for collaboration, It will enable us to now to have a clear picture on coverage area for cross border collaboration, which will have large impact on malaria elimination.

The meeting agreed on following issues:

- Both countries agreed to share information well in advance on dates and timing on Insecticide spray- IRS, LLIN distribution and treatment Regimens for synchronised implementation of activities/interventions and local actions for malaria elimination across borders.

Recommendations for:

National Program

- to share updated information on dates and timing on Insecticide spray-IRS, LLIN distribution and treatment Regimens for synchronised implementation of activities/interventions and local actions for malaria elimination across borders

SRCMF Secretariat

- Support and facilitate operationalisation of synchronised activities, Joint planning and implementation through timely coordination of the information sharing or organizing bilateral meeting.

b) Discussion on Strengthening information and data sharing and finalisation of the type of information

Introductory comments

Bhutan highlighted that due to covid-19, the interaction on WhatsApp has been affected. WhatsApp need to be strengthened for enhancing use to make information exchange more effective.

During the discussion the following points were raised and deliberated:

- WhatsApp group found to be useful and needs to be strengthening and increasing the number of groups using it. List of WhatsApp group periodically updated to be shared by both sides of the border on a regular basis.

- Facilitate starting of integrated web-based reporting platform at the regional level similar to Greater Mekong Sub region for sharing issues, problem and solutions
- SRCMF is in the process of consulting with the national programs regarding the type of information and content of the website.

The meeting agreed from the above discussions on the following issues:

Both sides agreed to update and share WhatsApp group list regularly (periodicity to be decided jointly at local level)

Recommendations for:

National Programs -

- update and share WhatsApp group list regularly (periodicity decided jointly at local level)

SRCMF Secretariat

- Facilitate starting of integrated web-based reporting platform at the regional level after reviewing the Greater Mekong Sub region website and after discussing with all the national programs.
- facilitate coordination of field level meetings at the cross-border area or site of the project and field visits to be arranged on both side of the border for the participants.
- SRCMF to consult with the national programs regarding the type of information and content of the website

c) Sharing names of focal/contact points at local, district and state level

Recommendation:

As agreed, it is recommended to exchange list of focal points and to update periodically and share the updated list including the groups becoming inactive and not responding timely on both sides.

3. Discussion on Budget

Introductory Comments

India suggested that all ongoing cross border activities to continue to be under govt funding, however for additional activities specific to cross-border, would require additional funds. Bhutan seconded India proposal for resource mobilisation for additional activities. SRCMF appraised delegation on CPF UNOPS-RMB 2021-02 Project funds availability and Proposal for application for SDF under matching funding mechanism and other proposals planed for resource mobilisation. Executive secretary requested delegation to consider cross- border funding allocation as an integral part under country allocations from the coming GF funding cycle. The additional funds for cross-border activities has to

be phased in under govt funding in the national malaria elimination program during the project period itself.

During the discussion the following points were deliberated:

1. SRCMF Executive secretary shared information on donors/organisations being explored for additional resources under matching funding mechanism besides SDF,
 - Rotary Foundation

Recommendation for:

National Programs

- Malaria elimination plan activities including cross border area which are funded under the national malaria elimination program will be continued under regular national govt funding.
- The funding for the additional activities for cross border area not covered under the regular budget will only be supplemented through external funding mobilised through SRCMF for the project period which will be phased into government funding for sustaining the program.

SRCMF Secretariat

- To Mobilise external resources for additional activities for cross border malaria elimination which are not met under the regular govt budget.

4) Implementation and M&E

Introductory Comments

Delegation highlighted the importance of need for exchange of information at different levels and periods, and cross border notification for effective follow-up and response.

During the discussion the following points were deliberated:

- SRCMF to have discussion with national programs for aligning any proposed M&E system with the national program.
- Emphasis on the importance and need to sustain activities to prevent resurgence or reintroduction of malaria in the region and countries was highlighted and hence to invest adequately on the surveillance system.

Recommendations for:

National Programs

- After proper consultation with the National Programs the agreed format for M&E which is implemented in cross border areas should be gradually mainstreamed into the national M&E system.

SRCMF Secretariat

- SRCMF to discuss further with national programs for alignment of agreed M&E with the national program.

5) Date, time and frequency of the next onsite bilateral meeting

Following points were discussed in relation to above agenda:

- Frequency of the bilateral meeting to be kept flexible, initially both sides can follow quarterly schedule with flexibly to meet 6 monthly at later time or earlier as and when required.
- next bilateral meeting should also involve local authorities so they are aware and informed of the ongoing activities on cross border and respond and cooperate with the Cross-border program and activities.
- It was also emphasised that for successful collaboration, face to face interaction is important. Decision on next face to face bilateral meeting at local level will be organised after review of the covid-19 situation.
- SRCMF to send request to India CCM and NVBDCP well in advance for introduction letter to the state and districts and travel permit/clearance for field level meetings and supervisory/monitoring visits and evaluation activities.

Recommendation for:

National Programs

- Frequency of the bilateral meeting to be kept flexible, initially both sides can follow quarterly schedules with flexibly to meet 6 monthly at later time or earlier as and when required.
- On receipt of request arrange permits and clearances for SRCMF staff/consultants/Partners/donors and visitors travel for meetings/field visits, supervisory/monitoring and evaluation.

SRCMF Secretariat

- After discussing with the National Programs to put up a proposal in the next bilateral/ regional meeting for the final approval with various option for frequency of bilateral meeting for countries to consider.
- SRCMF to send the request to respective country CCMs well in advance for any purposes such as introduction letter or travel to the state and districts and travel permit/clearance for field level meetings and supervisory/ monitoring visits and evaluation activities
- Officials from National programs to accompany SRCMF staff/consultants/Partners/donors/ all related to projects.

CLOSING

In the closing session the Executive Secretary thanked all the participants for their active participation and valuable contributions. He also thanked Chair for conducting the meeting efficiently and bringing it to a successful conclusion. He thanked all the participants for their participation, valuable guidance and suggestions.

The Chair addressed the closing session by thanking each and every delegate and SRCMF for their active participation, very productive deliberations and making a very productive meeting.

He reiterated support of India to Bhutan for their efforts to achieve malaria elimination by 2025. He looked forward to active role of SRCMF in cross-border collaboration towards malaria elimination in the region. The leader of Bhutanese thanked everyone and SRCMF to bring delegation back on board and looked forward to the next bilateral meeting.

The Chair formally closed the meeting at 11.30 AM IST.

Annexure:1

AGENDA
India-Bhutan Program Director level bilateral virtual Meeting for Cross-border Malaria Elimination, 6th September 2021

Time		Responsible person(s)
9.15-9.30	Virtual Registration	SRCMF Secretariat
9.30-9.40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome, Background, Objective and Expected Outcome of Meeting by Executive Secretary • Nomination of Chair 	Dr. Jigmi Singay
9.40-11.20	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Current and ongoing activities and areas for strengthening to be presented by Directors from both sides <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India • Bhutan 2. To confirm the border districts and Cross-border areas adjoining the international border for Malaria elimination in Cross-border area <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Identification and finalization of activities for synchronized implementation. b) Discussion on strengthening information and data sharing c) Sharing names of the focal/contact point at local, district and state level 3. Discussion on Budget 4. Implementation and M&E 5. Date, time and frequency of the next onsite bilateral meeting 	Chair: Dr. Avdhesh Kumar Dr. Neeraj Dhingra Mr. Tandin Dorji
11.20-11.25	AOB	Dr. Jigmi Singay
11.25-11.30	Closing	Dr. Jigmi Singay Chair: Dr. Avdhesh Kumar

Annexure:2

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

India-Bhutan Program Director level bilateral virtual Meeting for Cross-border Malaria Elimination,
6th September 2021

SN	Name	Designation	Organization	Country	Email Address
Delegation from India					
1	Dr. Neeraj Dhingra	Director	NVBDCP, MOH&FW, Govt. of India	India	dhingradr@hotmail.com
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3	Dr. Vinod P. Choudhary	Medical Officer	NVBDCP, MOH&FW, Govt. of India	India	drvinodnvdcp@gmail.com
4	Dr. Veena Kumra	Program Officer	CCM India	India	veenagnc@yahoo.com
Delegation from Bhutan					
5	Mr. Tandin Dorji	Director	Department Of Public Health (DoPH)	Bhutan	Tandindorji@health.gov.bt
6	Mr. Tobgyel	Program Analyst, Member Delegate	VDCP, Department of Public Health MoH	Bhutan	tobgye@health.gov.bt , tobgye@health.gov.bt
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Board Member SEA Secretariat					
11	Ms. Suneeta Chhetri	GF SEA Constituency Communication Focal Point (CFP)	CCM Bhutan	Bhutan	bhutanccm@gmail.com
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