



India-Bhutan District/Local Level Bilateral Meeting for Cross-border Malaria Elimination

Meeting Report

19 September 2022

Gelephu, Bhutan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

India-Bhutan District /local level onsite bilateral meeting for cross-border malaria elimination was organised by South-East Regional Coordination Mechanism Forum (SRCMF) on 19 Sept 2022 in Gelephu, Bhutan. The meeting was Chaired by Dr M.S. Lakshmi Priya, Mission Director, National Health Mission, Assam, Government of Assam, MOH&FW, Govt. of India and head of delegation of India and Co-chaired by Mr Rixin Jamtsho Offtg. Director, Department of Public Health, MoH, Bhutan and head of Bhutan delegation.

Mr Rixin Jamtsho welcomed the delegates which was followed by address by Dr Jigmi Singay Executive Secretary Cum Coordinator, SRCMF Secretariat, Dr M.S. Lakshmi Priya, Mission Director, National Health Mission, Assam, MOH&FW, Govt. of India, Chief Guest, Dasho Lobzang Dzungda, Dzongkhag Administration, Sarpang, Bhutan. Inaugural session concluded with vote of Thanks by Mr. Tobgyel Program Analyst, VDCP, Bhutan.

Both country delegates made a brief presentation on proposed cross-border joint planning and harmonised joint activities for implementation along adjacent international cross-border areas/districts. Both agreed on following proposed activities for implementation on identified 5kms radius corridor along the international border:

1. Indoor Residual spray (IRS) every 6 months
2. long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) once every 3 years
3. Sharing of case information and cross referrals as soon as case is diagnosed
4. Joint vector surveillance (Schedule to be fixed in the local/district meeting)
5. On line review meetings at local level (Schedule to be fixed in the local/district meeting)
6. Online sharing of learning resources through e-mails and WhatsApp

Both country delegates also identified districts malaria officers as focal point for coordination, information sharing, M&E and Review. Both expressed the need to strengthen the coordination and start implementation on immediate action points in the field level.

SRCMF agreed to organizing next bilateral meeting tentatively in Kokrajhar, Assam, India on 8-9 December 2022 with field visit

1. INAUGURAL SESSION

The India-Bhutan onsite district /local level bilateral meeting for cross-border malaria elimination started with inaugural session, commencing with welcome address by **Mr Rixin Jamtsho, Offtg. Director, Department of Public Health, MoH, Bhutan**. He extended warm welcome to the distinguished delegates from India and Bhutan and all the participants of the meeting. He thanked India for its support and cooperation in malaria program and further added that effective and strong collaboration between Bhutan and India has helped in bringing down the malaria cases significantly. He underlined that Cross-border malaria poses a major obstacle to achieving malaria elimination and reiterated that both countries should continue its joint effort towards malaria elimination. He hoped that this meeting identifies the bottlenecks, issues and challenges for cross-border collaboration and comes up with a result oriented joint action plan in checking any threat to and from neighbouring country in its efforts towards achievement of malaria elimination goal. He further added that integrated Malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS programmes, targeted in areas with co-endemicity, could enhance the coverage for these three priority diseases. He further underlined need for health systems strengthening for delivery of cost-effective and equitable intervention and achieving and sustaining three diseases elimination goal. He gave his best wishes for a successful and fruitful meeting.

Dr. Jigmi Singay, Executive Secretary Cum Coordinator SRCMF Secretariate welcomed Chief Guest, Dasho Lobzang Dorji, Dzongkhag Administration, Sarpang, Bhutan and Dr M.S. Lakshmi Priya, Mission Director, National Health Mission, Government of Assam, India for gracing the occasion and honouring the meeting with their presence in spite of their busy schedule. He also thanked Mr Rixin Jamtsho, Offtg. Director, Department of Public Health, MoH, Bhutan, Dr. L. Somorendra Singh, Sr. Regional Director, ROH&FW, Guwahati, Dr. Ruplal Nunisa, Joint Director of Health Services (Malaria)-cum-State Programme Officer and Dr. Keshab Barman, Sr. M&E Consultant, TCIF, NVBDCP Assam, distinguished and eminent member delegation from MoH Assam and Bhutan for attending the meeting. He looked forward to their guidance and support in efforts to achieve cross-border malaria elimination. He urged the delegation from both sides to deliberate and develop a joint implementation plan to accelerate efforts towards attainment of malaria free status in the cross-border districts of India and Bhutan so that it is not an obstacle for NMEPs to declare malaria elimination in the country and the Region. He underlined the need for investing in integrated district health system for achieve and sustain malaria elimination. He urged delegation members to reflect on two important areas:

- a) Integration of district malaria, TB and HIV services to enhance coverage, effectiveness and efficiency and avoid duplication

- b) Strengthen District Health systems to attain equitable and sustainable malaria, TB and HIV health outcomes

He briefly apprised participants on SRCMF historical aspect, formation and its mandate to strengthening cross-border coordination in 3 diseases (Malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS) and to Mobilise Resources. He also informed the participants about the ongoing process of registration of SRCMF in Bhutan for additional resource mobilisation. In conclusion he emphasised that SRCMF would be seen more frequently at local level and subdistrict level and wished the meeting successful deliberation.

Dr M.S. Lakshmi Priya, Mission Director, National Health Mission, Assam emphasised on life cycle approach on prevention and early intervention and urged both sides to focus on delivery of integrated effective care in a continuum. She also highlighted the importance of health systems strengthening to improve and sustain the health of different population groups. She reiterated the need for raising community awareness of disease, training, and engagement into all aspects of malaria elimination efforts. She further added that as we work toward the goal of cross-border malaria elimination, it will be relevant to use existing tools and current best practices and lesson learnt from countries who have already achieved malaria elimination.

She apprised the participants on the following initiative in Assam:

- a) Monthly camps held in every districts wherein data related to all possible health condition in the block is collected in the population
- b) Following which line listing of patients are prepared for follow up.

She suggested that Pair of districts adjoining international cross-border on both sides should develop a joint plan for effective cross-border collaboration for complementary responses through district-wise micro plans. She urged NMEP's to document all the work undertaken in cross-border district. She confirmed her full support and looked forward to being part of cross-border malaria elimination work in SEA Region.

Dasho Lobzang Dorji, Dzongkhag Administration, Sarpang, Bhutan highlighted that it is a historic time today that we are not talking about control but elimination, this itself is a huge achievement. After two and half years of COVID-19 now we are coming back to normalcy and thanked India for sharing Covid-19 vaccines with Bhutan. He added that malaria at international borders presents challenge with regards to elimination. Therefore cross-border collaboration for complementary responses through strong coordinated plan of action is essential for cross-border malaria elimination.

Mr. Tobgyel, Program Analyst, VDCP, Bhutan delivered vote of thanks on behalf of NMEP Bhutan. He thanked the Chief guest and all the speakers of the Inaugural session for very encouraging and inspiring address. He then thanked the delegates from India and Bhutan and all the participants for active participation and attending the meeting. He also thanked SRCMF Secretariat for bridging the two members states together.

2. BUSINESS SESSION

2.1 Appointment of Chair and Co-chair

The Session started with Executive Secretary Cum Coordinator, SRCMF Secretariat calling for nomination of Chair and Co-chair for the business session. Bhutan proposed and seconded to the meeting, Dr Lakshmi Priya, Mission Director, National Health Mission, Government of Assam for the Chairperson of the meeting. India nominated and seconded Mr. Rixin Jamtsho, Director, DoPH, Thimphu, Bhutan as Co-chair. Dr Lakshmi Priya, was appointed as the Chair and Mr. Rixin Jamtsho as Co-chair. Dr Jigmi Singay formally invited and handed over the Chairmanship to Dr Lakshmi Priya and requested her to conduct the bilateral onsite meeting.

2.2 Adoption of agenda

As per the agenda the Chairperson started the business session by inviting comments on the draft agenda. In absence of any comments the draft agenda was adopted

2.3) Presentation on way forward of the previous Cross-border local level Indo-Bhutan bilateral meetings

Chair invited Ms Natasha Dawa, Program Officer, SRCMF for her presentation

Ms Natasha Dawa, Program Officer, SRCMF presented the outcome of the previous cross-border bilateral meetings. She highlighted that in previous meetings all agreed that local level meetings are most important meeting for cross-border for Joint planning for synchronization of activities, same time implementation and M&E relevant to local context. She further highlighted that as part of the universal health coverage, we need to accelerate action to ensure that people have access to the health care they need especially high-risk groups like migrant and mobile populations & daily laborers. Harmonized and synchronized activities in cross-border areas/districts on both sides of the adjacent international border will ensure access to malaria services to those in need.

She shared that previous meeting agreed on synchronised activities of vector control measures in following areas:

- a) Indoor Residual Spray (IRS) -6 monthly-in border districts, on both sides, of the international border
- b) Long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) Mass Distribution, once every 3 years- Starting 2023 March/April
- c) Join vector surveillance – (Quarterly/half yearly) Schedule to be fixed in the local/district meeting
- d) Sensitization & involvement, of border security forces, in screening, mobile migrant population, with malaria symptoms/fever, at border crossing points, to catch malaria at entry

All previous meetings agreed the need for information sharing mainly to:

- a) detect cases and avoid outbreak and epidemic of malaria
- b) Notification/reporting of the positive imported cases for intervention to interrupt local transmission.
- c) map service providers & establish a network for cross-border referrals for case management and follow-up
- d) Explore various tools & mechanism for information sharing like WhatsApp, Emails, SRCMF website, existing platforms, portals etc

She further added that Importance of IEC/BCC & advocacy was also highlighted in previous meetings wherein both sides agreed to discuss the same through joint planning. She reiterated that in order to accelerate NMEPs activities in cross-border areas/district local level meeting should be regularly organized. She added that SRCMF will focus on priority to support making local meetings effective and meaningful and that from now onwards district/local level meeting will be a regular feature for joint planning with this meeting being a major step in cross-border coordination. She further added that SRCMF main function is coordination, Resource mobilisation for cross-border collaborative activities and partner & donor coordination at local level. She informed the participants that Policy issues like HR came up in previous meeting but could not deliberated much and that It will be discussed at appropriate time. She also added that issues on sustainability of program, especially pertaining to district HSS will also be supported along international cross-border areas.

Chair thanked Ms Natasha Dawa for her presentation. As the Chair had to leave for another meeting, she handled over the Chairmanship to Co-chair Mr Rixin Jamtsho, Director, DoPH, Thimphu.

2.4) Brief Presentation on joint planning and implementation of cross-border harmonized activities at local level.

Presentation by Sarpang, Bhutan

Mr. Tobgyel Program Analyst, VDCP, Bhutan highlighted the importance of cross border collaboration for malaria elimination in Bhutan. He added that 95% National Malaria Cases in Bhutan are confined to cross-border areas due to porous land border and large population movement across border (joint villages & towns). However cross border collaboration at the ground level is non-functional and there is no proper information sharing platform. He shared the current Foci of malaria by districts and added that in 2021 Active malaria foci were found in Sarpang and Residual Non- active malaria in S/Jongkhar with rest of the districts of Bhutan being malaria foci free. He highlighted that both the NMEPs in previous meetings had agreed 5km radius buffer for cross border intervention and shared list of Health Facilities (Table 1) mapped along the border villages within the 5km radius for both Bhutan and India side.

Table 1: List of Health Facilities in cross border villages of Bhutan and India

S. no	Districts (Bhutan)	Health Facility in Bhutan side	Bhutan Village	Indian Village
1	Samdrup Jongkhar	Jomotsangkha Hospital	Jomotsahngkha	Udalguri
			Rongchuthang	Khaorong
		Samrang PHC	Samrang	Samrang
		S/jongkhar hospital	S/jongkhar	Mela Bazaar /Dharanga
		Samdrupcholing Hospital	Samdrupcholing	Udalguri
2	Sarpang	Umling PHC	Gaden	Bakmara
		Chuzergang PHC	Chuzergang	Bakmara
		Gelephu CRR Hospital	Gelephu	Dadgari
		Taraythang PHC	Taraythang	Bakmara
		Gelephu CRR Hospital	Samteling	Tulki Basti
		Sarpang Hospital	Sarpang Tar	Muri/ Sarpara
			Dargaythang	Muri/ Sarpara
Gakidling (Hilley)	Salarpara/Muri			

On behalf of Sarpang district, Bhutan he proposed following Joint activities (Table 2) for implementation along the border:

Table 2: Proposed Joint activities proposed by Bhutan for implementation along the border

Proposed activity	Times	Scheduled timing
(1) Indoor residual Spray (IRS)	every six-monthly	1st round – Mid February – End of March 2nd round: Mid-August – End of September
(2) LLIN Mass distribution	Once every 3 yrs.	Due in Mar-April 2023
(3) Sharing of case Information and cross referral	As soon as the case is diagnosed	As and when malaria is reported
(4) Joint vector surveillance	Frequencies to be discussed	Schedule to be discussed
(5) Online Review Meeting at the local level	Every six month	1st Round: February 2nd Round: August
(6) Online sharing of learning resources through emails and WhatsApp	Any time	Anytime

Chair thanked delegate from Bhutan for a wonderful presentation and invited Dr. Keshab Barman, Sr. M&E Consultant, TCIF, NVBDCP Assam, India for his presentation.

Presentation by Assam, India:

Dr. Keshab Barman shared that 4 Districts of Assam – Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar & Udalguri border Bhutan and shared profile of these districts including, number of Sub-centres, number of private hospitals, private labs and number of villages adjacent to international border with Bhutan. He shared Malaria epidemiological situation- ABER, API and TPR of States and Indo-Bhutan cross-border districts. He further highlighted the following district malaria elimination Plan and implementation status (Table 3) in the identified cross-border districts of Assam:

Table 3: District Malaria elimination plan and implementation status in identified cross-border districts of Assam, India

Strategies	Implementation	Status
Malaria is a notifiable disease	Notified by Government on October 2018	All sectors
Surveillance/EDCT	ASHAs/CHO/MPWs	Improved
Line listing of malaria cases	Improved	Case base epidemiological/Entomological surveillance
Vector Control	LLIN distribution: 2020/21, ITBN IRS not carried out as a regular round	Saturated all the SCs (API>1 Selected area by camp approach in this year 2022

IEC/BCC	IPC/meeting/miking	Awareness increase, (LLIN uses/treatment seeking behaviour)
Capacity building	On progress	ASHAs/MPWS/ Lab technicians (on going)
Supervision& monitoring	All level	BPHC/District/State
Cross notification of malaria case	District/state	Cases of origin/inter district/interstate
Task Force meeting	State /District	Intersect oral coordination Improved
Special focus	Forest fringe villages	Engaged Health volunteer for diagnosis /treatment of malaria
Rewards to districts	Announces	ASHAs/volunteer /Health Workers

He shared the following Key activities undertaken in border areas/districts:

- a) Surveillance by ASHAs/ Volunteer/MPWS: RDTs and Anti-malarial are also available for the treatment.
- b) Vector Control: LLIN (661228 no.s) were distributed and regular monitoring visits conducted for uses of LLIN by the community.
- c) IPC. Miking, Group meeting also organized.
- d) School activity are carried out regularly.
- e) village health & sanitation day are organised

He added that Information on cross-referrals for interstate is available and no information was available on Cross border districts from 2020

He sharing the following next steps for cross-border collaboration:

- a) Exchange/ sharing of information on:
 - malaria cases by WhatsApp/ Email/face to face meeting with the district/BPHC officers with the counterpart
 - entomological survey information with the cross-border districts
 - Vector control measures like DDT spray/LLIN in bordering area.
 - field level activities like monitoring & supervision

2.5 THE FOLLOWING AGREEMENTS HAVE BEEN REACHED AFTER THE DELIBERATIONS:

- a) Dr Lakshmi Priya, Mission Director National Health Mission office and district Malaria officials of Government of Assam to organise a consultative meeting with district Malaria and TB officers of districts sharing international cross-border with Bhutan

- b) Exposure visits to country certified malaria free can be organised to understand malaria elimination strategies in cross-border areas
- c) Both the National Malaria Programme at the local level agreed on the following Joint activities for implementation:
- i. Indoor residual Spray (IRS)
 - ii. LLIN Mass distribution
 - iii. Immediate sharing and reporting of positive case, cross referral, follow-up and documentation at district level and mapping of health facilities on both sides on India and Bhutan
 - iv. Joint vector and entomological surveillance
 - v. Online Review Meeting at the local level
 - vi. Online sharing of learning, resources through emails and WhatsApp
- d) Both countries to conduct coordinated fever surveys and document it for better malaria Case management, reporting and response
- e) In India as per national guidelines villages with high-risk criteria (API>2) are considered to be protected by IRS and API >1 for LLINs. Since IRS and LLINs are core and complimentary malaria vector interventions for cross-border areas/districts where risk is more Bhutan proposed:
- to Dr L Somorendra Singh, CHS, Senior Regional Director, RoH & FW Guwahati, MoH & FW, Gol. to request NCVBDC at National level to permit flexibility, as per the local need to continue both these interventions at village level.
 - both countries would need to synchronise IRS and LLINs interventions and follow WHO elimination standards in order to achieve at least 3 consecutive years of zero indigenous cases to be eligible to apply for a WHO certification of malaria-free status.
- f) district micro plans, tailored to local context to be developed, to undertake effective action on ground for cross-border collaboration in the districts of India and Bhutan sharing international border. In the next bilateral meeting both countries to present together the joint action taken at ground level.
- g) Both sides to work on and finalise a short common district level strategy document for cross-border high-risk areas/districts and to present it in next meeting

- h) Both sides to revive and reactivate the WhatsApp group for initiating communication for data sharing between Sarpang district in Bhutan and adjoining districts in Assam for sharing cross-border initiatives and cases.
- i) Both sides to identify M&E officers for documentation and to track progress on cross-border coordination
- j) District level Nodal officers /district malaria officers/coordinators to be nominated on both sides to coordinate all international cross-border malaria elimination activities at local level, organise local level meetings between two NMEPs, coordinate implementation of sharing of information and implementation of local level joint planning, synchronised activities, joint surveillance, M&E, including supervision and periodic reviews of malaria elimination programme activities in cross-border areas/districts
- k) It was reiterated that Health and Community System Strengthening is essential for ending HIV, TB and malaria and producing better health outcomes for sustainable health system
- l) Next bilateral meeting was proposed to be in Kokrajhar district of Assam on 8-9 December 2022 with a field visit

2.5 RECOMMENDATIONS OF INDIA-BHUTAN BILATERAL ONSITE MEETING:

National Programs:

1. In line with the bilateral meeting agreement between National Malaria Elimination Programmes from India and Bhutan it is recommended to identify the Nodal officers /district malaria officers/coordinators for the cross-border Coordination, information sharing and M&E and Review at local and district level and state level were required/applicable and submit the list to SRCMF Secretariat with copy to the counterpart.
2. The meeting agreed and recommended following Joint activities for implementation:
 - vii. Indoor residual Spray (IRS)
 - viii. LLIN Mass distribution
 - ix. Immediate sharing and reporting of positive case, cross referral, follow-up and documentation at district level and mapped health facilities on both sides

- x. Joint vector and entomological surveillance
 - xi. Online Review Meeting at the local level
3. Dr Lakshmi Priya, Mission Director National Health Mission, Assam, office and district Malaria officials of Government of Assam to organise a consultative meeting to discuss cross-border malaria and TB elimination with district Malaria and TB officers of the cross-border districts adjoining international border with Bhutan
 4. Both countries to conduct coordinated fever surveys and document it for better Malaria case management, reporting and response
 5. Dr L Somendra Singh, CHS, Senior Regional Director, RoH & FW Guwahati, MoH & FW, Gol. to request NCVBDC at National level to permit flexibility, as per the local need to continue both these interventions at village level as per WHO standards
 6. district level micro plans for effective joint action on ground to be tailored to the local context and presented by both the countries together in the next bilateral meeting
 7. Both sides to work on and finalise a short common district level strategy document for high-risk areas/districts and present it in next meeting
 8. Both sides to revive and reactivate the WhatsApp group for initiating communication for data sharing for sharing cross-border initiatives and cases
 9. Both sides to identify M&E officers for proper documentation and track progress on cross-border activities
 10. Health and Community System to be Strengthening for ending HIV, TB and malaria and producing better health outcomes for sustainable health system

SRCMF Secretariat:

1. coordination and collaboration for the National Malaria Elimination Programmes at local and district level.
2. Facilitate information and data sharing between two National Malaria Elimination Programmes on both side of the international border.
3. facilitate discussions on type of data for information sharing and harmonisation of efforts between the countries in joint national committees
4. Facilitate organisation of regular meetings between the two programmes at the local level for implementation of Joint planning, synchronised activities, joint surveillance, M&E and for review of malaria elimination programme activities at the local and district level.
5. Coordinate participation of technical agencies like WHO and other relevant agencies, partners and donors who are involved in acceleration of malaria elimination activities.

6. Mobilise external resources required for additional activities for acceleration of cross border area/district malaria elimination.
7. Put up a proposal for next bilateral meeting

3 CLOSING SESSION:

In the closing session the Executive Secretary thanked Chair and Co-Chair for conducting the meeting efficiently and bringing it to a successful conclusion. He thanked delegates from Bhutan and India, Resource Person and all the participants for active participation, valuable guidance and suggestions. Mr Rixin Jamsho thanked the delegates for their active participation and very productive deliberations and SRCMF for organising this bilateral meeting.

The Chair formally closed the meeting at 3:30 pm IST

Annexures 1

Draft Agenda

Time		Responsible person(s)
8:00-8:30	Registration	SRCMF Secretariat
	Inaugural Session	
8:30-9:00	Marchang Ceremony	
9:00-9:05	Welcome Address by Offtg. Director, Department of Public Health, MoH, Bhutan	Mr Rixin Jamtsho
9:05-9:10	Address by Executive Secretary Cum Coordinator, SRCMF Secretariat	Dr Jigmi Singay
9:10-9:15	Address by Mission Director, National Health Mission, Assam, Government of Assam, India	Dr M.S. Lakshmi Priya
9:15-9:25	Address by Chief Guest, Dasho Dzungda, Dzongkhag Administration, Sarpang, Bhutan	Dasho Lobzang Dorji
9:25-9:30	Vote of Thanks by Program Analyst, VDCP, Bhutan	Mr. Tobgyel
9:30-9:45	Tea Break	
	Business Session	
9:45-9:50	Nomination of Chair and Co-chair	
9:50-2:00	Adoption of Agenda <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Presentation on way forward of the previous Cross-border local level Indo-Bhutan bilateral meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discussions 2) Brief Presentation on joint planning and implementation of cross-border harmonized activities at local level. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bhutan -India -Discussions and conclusions 3) Group work on cross border implementation activities and monitoring frequency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bhutan -India -Presentation, discussions and finalization of harmonized process of Implementation and M&E 4) Follow-up meetings <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Frequency of follow-up meetings b) Support required from SRCMF (Technical, Logistics/Health System Strengthening) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discussions 5) Coordinators/Focal Points roles and responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bhutan -India - Discussions 6) Date and venue of next meeting 	Chair: -Ms Natasha Dawa -Bhutan -India -do- -do- -do-
2:00-2:05	AOB	Dr. Jigmi Singay
2:05-2:30	Closing	Chair: -Delegation Heads -Any other delegates -Dr. Jigmi Singay -Chair

Annexures 2

List of Participants

SN	Name	Designation	Organization	Country	Email Address
Delegation from India					
1	Dr. Ruplal Nunisa	Joint Director of Health Services (Malaria)-cum-State Programme Officer	NVBDCP Assam	India	papli3006@gmail.com , ncvbdcassam@gmail.com
2	Dr. Keshab Barman	Sr. M&E Consultant, TCIF	NVBDCP Assam	India	keshab51barman@gmail.com
3	Dr. L. Somorendra Singh	Sr. Regional Director,	ROH & FW Guwahati, MoH&FW, GoI	India	rd.gwh-mohfw@gov.in , rd.rohnfw@gmail.com
4	Dr Lakshmi Priya, IAS,	Mission Director National Health Mission, Assam	Government of Assam	India	mdnrhmasm@gmail.com
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Delegation from Bhutan					
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