

Editorial

All SAARC Member States have a National AIDS Strategy and National AIDS Programmes in place. The SAARC Regional Strategy on HIV and AIDS addresses specific opportunities and challenges common to most countries in the region while identifying priorities that are best addressed collectively at Regional Level. The SAARC has developed SAARC Regional Strategic Framework for Protection, Care and Support for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS (CHABA) and the Member States are working towards a consistent approach across South Asia for the protection, care and support of children affected by HIV and AIDS. In addition SAARC has provided a Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines of National Responses for Children Affected by HIV/AIDS, which aims to assist countries in this regards.

In order to reduce the number of new HIV infections in children, several countries globally and the SAARC Member States, are focusing on Prevention of Parent to Child Transmission (PPTCT) of HIV. A specific antiretroviral treatment regimen is initiated as prophylaxis to PLHIV who are pregnant as an effective part of PPTCT. The goal is 'eliminating (or stopping) new HIV infections in children and keeping mothers alive'.

With all these tools in place, stigma and discrimination against HIV and AIDS leads to misconceptions and lack of full and correct knowledge about HIV and AIDS. Due to the stigma; approach to this group of affected children can be difficult. Due to social exclusion many people get disowned by their own families and are not in position to get services offered by the communities and government. This makes difference to these children, as many of them are excluded from school, routine health care and social rituals and events.

It is high time that some concrete steps are taken by the governments of Member States, the civil society and PLHIV groups to address these issues. Ideally it should be such that children affected by AIDS have the same rights as other children for availability of health, education and other basic services. Community awareness through mass media campaigns should be prioritized at National as well as Regional level. The SAARC Goodwill Ambassadors for HIV/AIDS are playing a monumental role in the advocacy process regionally to reduce the stigma and discrimination.