WHO urges member nations to step up efforts against diseases

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In a recent meeting at the Seventieth Regional Committee Session of WHO South-East Asia Region held at Male recently, The World Health Organization urged the South East Asian nations to take bold action and step up efforts ensuring citizens access to safe efficacious, quality and affordable medical products.

The World Health Organisation suggested that the capacities of health systems should be strengthened to prevent, detect and eliminate existing and emerging vector-borne diseases such as dengue and chikungunya in India and South-East Asia. The WHO emphasized on leveraging collective strengths through greater inter-country cooperation.

"Overcoming barriers and ensuring all people everywhere can access essential medicines is one of WHO South-East Asia's priority areas of work," said, Dr Poonam Singh Khetrapal, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region. "It is vital to achieve universal health coverage, and with it the Sustainable Development Goal of health and well-being for all," Khetrapal said.

"A more holistic and integrated approach, along with improved capacities at national and sub-national levels, are vital to effectively respond to vector-borne diseases. Most vector-borne diseases are preventable if vector control is well implemented," she added.
Unplanned urbanization, increased movement of people and goods, and environmental changes have led to a rise in increased diseases and epidemics, noted the health governing body.

Dr Singh urged that Asian countries need to establish and strengthen effective entomological surveillance systems to study local mosquito species, their susceptibility to insecticides, monitor insecticide resistance, as well as vector and human behaviours that may allow mosquitoes to avoid interventions and thereby maintain disease transmission. Proven and cost-effective interventions such as the use of insecticidal nets, indoor spraying, use of larvicides, and eliminating mosquito breeding sites need to be further promoted through stronger community engagement.

"Poor-quality or unsafe medicines likewise affects peoples' ability to access the treatment they need, when they need it, while weak supply chains and inefficient procurement provide similar barriers," she said.

Stating that significant progress has been made in recent years, including the creation of the South-East Asia Regulatory Network (SEARN) in 2016, which pools the Region's regulatory resources to enhance the safety and quality of medicines, Khetrapal called for the need to build on that progress and strengthen regional cooperation in a range of areas to further address this critical issue.

She also outlined few key areas where countries can work together, and with WHO, to drive substantial gains in access to medicines across the Region—scaling up of inter country and regional collaboration on public procurement and pricing.