



Thematic Area 4: Health: *Facilitate Universal Health Coverage*

Rationale

SAARC Member States have dramatically improved their health indicators in the past 15 years such as infant mortality, maternal mortality and skilled birth attendance and stunting though the achievements fell short of the targets set in some countries. Life expectancy rates have significantly increased in all SAARC states, so did the Human Development Index (HDI). Though there were significant improvements in health care and access, there is still a critical need for these countries to continuously take significant strides to achieve their Universal Health Coverage (UHC) goals. Evidence suggests considerable inequalities in health care with the poor and marginalized facing severe deprivation in primary and secondary health care.

Goal 3 of the SDGs (to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), with its target 3.8 on universal health coverage (UHC), emphasizes the importance of all people and communities having access to quality health services without risking financial hardship. All SAARC Member States have embraced the goal of UHC and have been reforming and strengthening their respective health care systems. These health services include those targeting individuals, such as curative care and population-based services, such as health promotion. However, providing UHC entails commitment of huge budgetary resources in each country and given the fiscal pressures of each country, each of the Member States is constrained in fulfilling its commitment for ensuring UHC.

OUTCOME STATEMENT: Increase Progress towards Universal Health Coverage in the SAARC Region



Access to Quality Basic Health Services

SDF believes that investments in improving community-based health care delivery and its facilities are critical for addressing the health-related challenges currently facing the SAARC Member States. It also acknowledges the challenges faced by the Member States to provide for increased access

and provision of better health care services to its populations.

To support Member States in achieving their UHC goals, SDF will support projects that aim to ensure access to quality health services for the most vulnerable of populations across the SAARC region. Along with the other funding windows of the SDF, it will facilitate both direct and indirect investments into quality health care infrastructures such as basic health units and community hospitals, including investments for ICT enabled health care provision and health information

management systems. It will further work with projects that strive to inculcate SAARC standards and agreements for mutual recognition of health care professions/health workers, and accreditation of hospital/care providers in the SAARC region.

Potential Areas for Collaboration

- Advocacy, policy and institutional strengthening
- Investments in Health infrastructure in rural areas (together with the other funding windows of SDF)
- Investments in HMIS
- Promotion of technology-based health delivery solutions