

INAUGURAL SESSION
(07 MAY 2018)

REGIONAL CONFERENCE
ON
SCALING-UP THE NUTRITIONAL CARE OF WOMEN IN SOUTH ASIA,
KATHMANDU, 07-09 MAY 2018

REMARKS BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSAIN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

I am pleased to address the Inaugural Session of the “Regional Conference on Scaling-up the Nutritional Care of Women in South Asia”, on the theme ‘STOP STUNTING – Power of Maternal Nutrition’. We are happy to co-host this important Regional Conference with UNICEF, for the second year.

I wish to extend a very warm welcome to all participants. I am very happy to see over 120 participants from the region and other parts of the world. The wealth of knowledge and experience that they bring will surely enrich the deliberations of this important Conference.

Distinguished Delegates,

As we are aware, good nutrition and a healthy diet is important in every phase of life. It is even more crucial, during pregnancy, both for the health of the mother and the baby during the first years of the babies’ life. Poor dietary intake, with insufficient nutrients, during pregnancy is an immediate and direct cause of undernutrition. This cause is attributed to a number of underlying socio-economic factors, leading to wasted or stunted life of a child, which in turn leads to poor performance in education, jobs, health issues, and overall impact in the life of an individual.

Distinguished Delegates,

Women influence their children’s nutritional status through their pregnancy outcomes as well as through effect on child care practices. Poor dietary intake and poor availability of nutrients consumed due to ill health are well-known. The implications of direct nutrition interventions on women’s nutrition, birth outcome and stunting rates in children in South Asia are indisputable and well documented.

One third of world’s women with anaemia live in South Asia. Improving nutritional situation of women and children in South Asia requires reaching out to women during adolescence, pre-conception and pregnancy stage. In the meanwhile, combining nutrition-specific interventions with measures aimed at empowering women is essential.

There is increasing evidence and recognition among the scientific community that it will be difficult to achieve rapid and significant progress in reducing childhood stunting without scaling up evidence-based direct nutrition interventions as well as simultaneously addressing the

underlying socio-economic causes that adversely influence nutrition of women. Poor socio-economic status of women not only affect fetal growth and pregnancy outcome but also adversely impacts behavioral practices pertaining to appropriate self and child care, which contribute to low body mass index (BMI) in women and stunting in children.

Women's nutrition, a low priority in the public health agenda of most developing countries, including South Asia, needs special attention. Governments need to look at how we can provide healthy diet and lifestyle to our people, especially pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers. We need to look at improving nutritional care through a multi-sectoral approach. We must strive towards a collective effort that involves health providers, community-based workers, families, schools, and mothers themselves.

Distinguished Delegates,

In conclusion, I would like to thank UNICEF-ROSA for its continued and excellent collaboration with SAARC to address issues related to children, and in our hope to provide them a future where they live in an environment which is safe, healthy and conducive to their development. I wish for productive deliberations and a successful outcome of the Regional Conference, in the best interest of children of South Asia.

I thank you.
