Collaboration and Cross-learning

Nigeria delegation visits Karnataka on study tour
A delegation of TB experts including representatives from the Nigerian health ministry, NGOs and USAID Nigeria visited Karnataka as part of a study tour to learn from India’s TB control efforts, including private sector engagement, public-private partnerships, the role of intermediary organizations and the implementation of technology solutions for treatment adherence. KHPT facilitated the two-day immersion on June 14 and 15, during which they introduced the team to THALI’s community-centred initiatives including patient support groups, health information centres and community structures. THALI staff also accompanied the team to meetings with the State TB Officer and other RNTCP staff, where they learned about various initiatives in Karnataka, including scaling up of CBNAAT, Active Case Finding campaigns and implementation of adherence technologies.

KHPT team visits Nikshay Sampark office in a cross-learning initiative
Members of the THALI team visited the Nikshay Sampark office in Noida to understand the working of the government-run TB Helpline and also offer suggestions for its efficient functioning based on KHPT's experience with running the TB Careline. The team met with call-centre executives and supervisors and offered some suggestions related to operations and interactions with patients and providers. These included simplifying the language used to train call-centre executives, creating a state-wise list of DMCs to which patients can be directed and providing status updates to RNTCP facility staff in case patients do not adhere to treatment.

Capacity Building Initiatives to Enhance Patient Services

Karnataka health education officers trained on counselling skills
KHPT supported Karnataka’s initiative to create a cadre of health education officers at district, block and taluk level who are trained in counselling skills. The training of trainers programme was conducted in two batches from June 10-14 and June 17-21 by a team from KHPT comprised of a counselling specialist, technical coordinators and a district project officer, working with Dr Anil S, Deputy Director- TB and Dr Nirmala, Senior Specialist- TB, from the RNTCP. The five-day training included sessions on TB, stigma, differentiated care and an orientation on the RNTCP, as well as practical sessions and role plays on communication in counselling, listening skills and body language. The master trainers will begin training RNTCP personnel including Senior Treatment Supervisors and TB Health Visitors from August 2019 to integrate counselling into their interactions with patients. KHPT will provide handholding support as the trainings roll out across the state.

Medical officers and pharmacists trained on IDAT enrolment
KHPT, along with WHO consultants and the RNTCP, facilitated training sessions for Medical Officers and pharmacists in five districts on patient enrolment to Integrated Digital Adherence Technologies (IDAT). 428 Medical Officers and 493 pharmacists were trained in Belgaum, Tumkur, Bijapur, Bengaluru Urban and Bagalkot through the month of May.
Following a round of training earlier in April, district-level RNTCP staff began enrolling TB patients from May 17. Three technologies - DOT599, Medication Event Reminder Monitoring System (MERM) and Video Observed Therapy (VOT) - are being piloted, and more patients have been observed opting for DOT599 and MERM.

Community Engagement

TBAI supports RNTCP community initiative in Telangana
TB Alert India worked with the state RNTCP team in Telangana to organize a community initiative which would bring the RNTCP and staff of the general health system together to create TB awareness among the community. Around 200 people participated in the event held at Hyderabad, including community representatives, leaders and local frontline health workers. THALI staff used this as an opportunity to share how community representatives are supporting TB patients through patient support groups and community structures. An additional six representatives were identified at the event to form TB clubs at community level that are aimed to identify and address patient concerns.

Community Health Workers enable care and support for prison inmates in Mangalore
The District Program Coordinator and Community Health Workers [CHWs] in Mangalore conducted sensitization and screening activities for prisons staff and prisoners over the April-May period. Through their screening activities, THALI staff found six cases of TB among prison inmates. They created linkages between the prison authorities and the RNTCP to arrange for medication for the TB patients on a monthly basis. The team also connected prison staff to the district hospital to help patients manage adverse drug reactions and comorbidities.
Through further follow-up, the team spoke to jail authorities about setting up a system through which they will screen all incoming inmates for TB symptoms, in addition to screening current inmates, and refer them to the district hospital for testing. The District TB Officer also wrote to the prison authorities to ensure the provision of nutritious food for TB patients.
**THALI works with RNTCP on monthly Anti-TB Day in Andhra Pradesh**

The Principal Secretary of Andhra Pradesh introduced an initiative observing ‘Anti-TB Day’ on the third Friday of each month, during which health departments, other line departments and health facilities will have to address issues faced by TB patients and focus especially on their care and support. The TBAI team worked with RNTCP and other health staff to organize rallies and meetings with ASHAs, Anganwadi workers and the community to create awareness on this initiative. This campaign was inaugurated by District TB Control Officers and other health officials, who will oversee the implementation of Anti-TB Day.

**Telangana reviews THALI innovations**

State TB Officer for Telangana Dr Rajesham met with the TBAI team on June 1 to discuss the Risk and Needs Assessment (RANA) and Differentiated Care Model (DCM), which have been implemented in collaboration with the RNTCP for six months. Dr Rajesham assured the team of his continued support and guidance to improve the uptake of RANA and DCM at the RNTCP level.

**USAID visit to THALI innovations in Karnataka**

Mr. Xerses Sidhwa, Director, Health Office, USAID India, visited various THALI community initiatives in Bengaluru and Mangalore on June 14 and 15, including patient support groups, health information centres and community structures taking ownership of TB control in their areas. Mr. Xerses Sidhwa interacted with a patient support group in Bengaluru.

**Government Engagement**

Mr. Xerses Sidhwa, Director, Health Office, USAID India, visited various THALI community initiatives in Bengaluru and Mangalore on June 14 and 15, including patient support groups, health information centres and community structures taking ownership of TB control in their areas. "The community's involvement and ownership is very evident through these interactions," he said, adding that there was scope to focus on stigma at a family level.

**Program Review**

**THALI staff take part in RNTCP state evaluation in Bagalkot**

The RNTCP conducted a State Internal Evaluation from June 11-13 with the objective of evaluating the performance of the Bagalkot district RNTCP team. Two members of the THALI staff from KHPT were part of the team consisting of state RNTCP staff, WHO consultants, and District TB Officers from other districts, which assessed TB notification, TB diagnostics, treatment services and follow up through triangulation. The evaluation, which also included patient interviews and visits to more than 30 health facilities, found a gap in the understanding and implementation of the programme, with the need for efforts to be made to strengthen the district team at all levels.

**Voices from the field**

"We have witnessed a phenomenal mix of public and private programs through the learning visit. Infection control mechanisms are in very good shape here. We would like to try TB control through everyone’s involvement – public-private, NGOs and community - and take these programmes onboard in Nigeria."

Dr Ibrahim Aliyu Omar, Program Manager, State TB and Leprosy Control Program, Kano, State Ministry of Health, Nigeria

"I am very happy that the USAID Director visited our Primary Health Centre. We feel that we are making our best possible efforts for TB control. If there are any suggestions for improvement, we will definitely welcome them since Mr. Xerses speaks from an international perspective."

Dr Ravishankar, Medical Officer, Abbigere Primary Health Centre, Bengaluru

"We appreciate TBAI’s timely support to the community engagement meeting on TB awareness in Hyderabad for the field supervisors and TB Champions. It was a good learning experience for the participants and we look forward to active community engagement in the TB control program."

Dr A. Rajesham, State Tuberculosis Officer, Telangana

**THALI holds visioning workshop for next phase of TB initiatives**

The project teams of KHPT and TB Alert India gathered in Sakleshpur from May 28-29 to envision and shape the next phase of THALI, which will focus on reducing deaths among HIV-TB patients, providing differentiated care for vulnerable patients, empowering community structures to take responsibility of TB control at the grassroot level, and creating patient support groups at facility level. The teams collectively worked through the intricacies of planning and implementation of the four initiatives, while also discussing cross-cutting activities such as monitoring and evaluation and communications, while laying down timelines for each.

**Community engaged in social mapping exercise in Ballari**

THALI CHWs conducted a social mapping exercise in the Bandimot slum of Ballari on June 21, involving the community in identifying active community structures in their areas. The team identified 12 community structures with the help of the area’s residents. The THALI Community Coordinator will visit them to assess their willingness to contribute towards TB control efforts in the area. If the key persons of the structures are willing, the THALI team will then commence their capacity building on TB and link them to the RNTCP.

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For more information on the above activities, please contact Vrinda Manocha, Sr. Communications Officer, at vrinda.manocha@khpt.org