



Celebrating

25 YEARS OF REACH

***EQUITABLE
HEALTH FOR ALL***



OUR CHARTER

REACH is dedicated to creating a community where all individuals receive holistic health care. In this, our 25th year, we dedicate ourselves to ensuring physical, mental and social well-being of all, through the values defined in this charter



EQUITY: Championing access to health care for all, while recognising diversities and the unique needs of communities

DIGNITY: Treating all people with respect, acceptance, autonomy, empathy and fairness

ACCOUNTABILITY: Building a culture of responsibility and ownership in all collective action

QUALITY: Achieving the highest standards in all our efforts to provide the best possible, timely, integrated and person-centred care

INTEGRITY: Committing to function in an ethical, scientific and conscientious manner

INCLUSIVITY: Engaging diverse actors and communities for truly collaborative partnerships



PREFACE

On this occasion of our 25th Anniversary, it is my privilege, on behalf of the REACH Executive Committee and the entire REACH team, to present this publication, featuring 25 individuals and organisations whose lives we are proud, and grateful, to have impacted through our efforts. Each person featured in this book represents a larger constituency that we have worked with over the years – people with TB and their families, TB survivors and Champions, community-led networks, private providers, pharmacists, journalists etc.

In many ways, REACH's successes stem from the clarity of its founders, whose clear vision was uniquely ambitious at the time. Many of today's benchmarks of a strong public health response – building partnerships with the private sector, investing in engaging communities, involving women and adopting gender-responsive strategies – were integral to REACH from the beginning. I especially recall with gratitude the vision and leadership of Prof. M. S. Swaminathan, Founder and Chairperson of REACH until 2021, whose guidance helped shape REACH as an institution and make it what it is today.

I take this opportunity to thank my colleagues on the Executive Committee, whose leadership and oversight strengthen the organisation and lend it considerable credibility. I congratulate every member of the 150+ REACH team, from Tamil Nadu to Himachal Pradesh, each of whom have helped translate the organisation's ambitious vision to tangible action. If we have been able to design, demonstrate and scale-up multiple innovations as part of India's response to TB, it is due to this technically sound, creative, committed and compassionate team of public health leaders.

Today, as we complete a-quarter-of-a-century, our future is clear. We know that a lot of work remains ahead of us, and it is in this spirit that we adopted a new charter and vision for the organisation last year. Each of the values in the charter – equity, dignity, quality, integrity, inclusivity, accountability – are important to the organisation, and deeply embedded in our ethos. We will continue to work, with honesty and transparency, and in the spirit of true partnership, towards achieving equitable health for all in India.



Mr. Rajivan Krishnaswamy
President, REACH
January 2024

PREFACE

REACH was founded as a result of a meeting of minds to respond to critical issues in public health in India. Our founding members came together to discuss and define a vision and strategy to address issues in the control of Tuberculosis (TB) and other public health challenges, a need which was perceived and articulated by Dr P.R. Narayanan, then Director of Tuberculosis Research Centre ICMR.

Under the visionary guidance of Professor M.S Swaminathan, the eminent agricultural scientist, REACH was founded as a nonprofit organisation under Prof Swaminathan's chairmanship and helmed by a group of members who were experts in their field, both within and outside of the medical fraternity, who till today have kept their commitment and engagement with the organisation.

Public health management is seen largely as the domain of the government. However, in a landscape where there is a plethora of healthcare providers, different patterns of health seeking behavior of patients, issues in access to healthcare and various other social and financial drivers, delivering equitable and quality healthcare requires the involvement of different stakeholders within the community. TB is a classic example of the complex path to care which has hindered the progress in the control of the disease, at global, national and community levels.

The World Health Organization declared TB as a global emergency in 1993 and though countries have made tremendous progress in controlling and working to eliminate TB by 2030, the end is not in sight. India has an even more ambitious plan to eliminate TB by 2025 but even with the tremendous political, resources and new strategies in place, we are struggling to get to elimination. Pulmonary TB is transmissible by air, and treatment outcomes are determined not by just writing a prescription but a host of other factors such as a long treatment period, stigma, social and economic factors and access issues.

What has been acknowledged only in recent times by policy makers in India when reworking the end TB strategy is the need for collaboration.

We are proud to say today the REACH has from its inception been a strong believer in partnership and was founded on these principles that are still the basis of our work today, some of which are:

The person with TB and the community they live in should be at the epicenter of all planning and delivery of care

A strong providers' network cutting across all sectors is vital to enable care to be taken to the patients' doorstep

Individualised treatment for every individual to mitigate or overcome barriers to care through the support of community volunteers and localised care centers

The community and survivors' voices should shape and inform strategy on a continuing basis as we adapt to new challenges within the community

TB survivors are the strongest influencers and advocates for progress in eliminating TB

As we complete 25 years of working in TB, we have learned, grown and expanded our scope layering management of comorbidities, promoting survivor-led networks, working and evolving strategies to address gender, equity, inclusiveness and diversity all of which has led to more successful outcomes for the person with TB and the community.

We are proud to say that many of these strategies that REACH implemented and demonstrated have been included in the National Strategic Plans at different points of time especially those concerning gender, survivor networks and multistakeholder involvement.

Most importantly, we have continued and improved upon the ways and means to provide a caring and empathetic environment for people with TB to access early diagnosis, free and high-quality care and social and nutritional support and above all, help them become key drivers of their own outcomes.

Our demonstrated success over the last 25 years has not been without its challenges and struggles. However, we are indeed very fortunate to have been sustained by our members and founders' vision and guidance over these years, the passion and dedication of our staff and volunteers and great leadership within the organisation.

What has been of great value to REACH is the trust that we have earned of the public health system at national, state and city levels, being truly recognised as partners in the fight against TB. Most of all, as we look back, we are grateful for the relationship we have with the people we support and within the communities where we work, which continues to grow and strengthen.

As we rededicate ourselves to our work, we hope that these relationships will continue and sustain our efforts in the years to come.

Dr. Nalini Krishnan

Founder-Director & Executive Secretary, REACH

January 2024

With our deepest gratitude and in remembrance of Prof. M. S. Swaminathan's leadership over two decades, steering REACH to become an organisation that will always prioritise the needs of TB-affected communities and support them holistically.





Dr Soumya Swaminathan
Chairperson

FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I extend my congratulations to the REACH team, as they complete 25 years of action in the fight against TB in India. I have known REACH from their modest beginnings – I recall several early conversations between my father Prof M. S. Swaminathan who was their Founder-Chairperson for over two decades and Dr. Nalini Krishnan, whose determination, dedication and dynamism has made REACH what it is today.

For me, what sets REACH apart from other organisations is their willingness and insistence on going the full mile, beyond the demands of projects, donors or deliverables. They see people for what they are, as individuals with varied needs, living in different kinds of circumstances and with many different vulnerabilities. Accordingly, their response is tailored to help people overcome TB, but also to support them to build better lives, and improve their physical, emotional, financial and social well-being. This is the true definition of holistic, person-centred care.

Take for example REACH's Women TB Leaders intervention, a personal favourite of mine. They were able to build a cadre of inspiring women, empowering them with the knowledge and skills they needed to become leaders in their own communities. Similarly, their work with TB Champions has culminated in the formation of several survivor-led networks, which are ideally poised to act as a bridge between the health system and those affected by TB.

Finally, I have witnessed first-hand REACH's contributions to the ambitious TB-free Chennai movement. Their flagship Nakshatra centres provide high-quality, integrated TB and NCD care to people seeking health services in the private sector and are a highly replicable model for private sector engagement.

REACH's work is not done. As they expand from addressing TB to other important areas of public health, I am confident that they will draw on their rich experience, learning from their successes and challenges, to help us achieve equitable health care in India.

January 2024

Soumya Swaminathan

SPECIAL MESSAGE

My association with REACH is over two decades old – I have practically known the organisation since inception. I recall several early discussions with the REACH team on their private sector engagement model, embodied in the Nakshatra Centres we see across Chennai today. Their work was – and continues to be – grounded in a simple philosophy – every individual has a right to the highest quality of health care, irrespective of whether they go to the public or private sector. REACH's work in bringing together the diverse private health care sector is exemplary, and is in my opinion one of the best examples of enduring public private partnerships for health in the country.

During my years as Health Secretary for the Govt of Tamil Nadu, I also had the opportunity to witness REACH's expansion across the state, through their various community mobilisation activities. One unique aspect of the organisation is their ability to adopt an integrated approach to both health systems and community systems strengthening, working in close coordination with communities as well as the public health system. I am happy to see that they have been able to take this approach and expand it across the country.

The recently published National TB Prevalence Survey has shown that we still have a lot of work ahead of us if we are to end TB in India. Today, as REACH commemorates their 25th anniversary, I congratulate the dynamic team led by Dr. Ramya Ananthakrishnan, and lovingly nurtured over the years by my dear friend, Dr. Nalini Krishnan. I am proud of what the REACH team has achieved over the years and wish them continued success in their determined efforts to help achieve equitable health for all in our country.



Dr. Girija Vaidyanathan IAS
Former Chief Secretary, (Retd.) Govt of Tamil Nadu
January 2024



सत्यमेव जयते



Dr. Rajendra P. Joshi
Deputy Director General
Central TB Division

भारत सरकार
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
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Special Message

On behalf of Central TB Division, it gives me great pleasure to extend our heartiest congratulations to the REACH team, on achieving this milestone of completing 25 years. This is a special moment for any organisation, and REACH can be very proud of what they have been able to accomplish over the years.

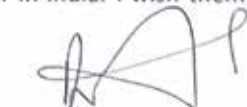
REACH has been a vital partner for the National TB Elimination Programme, first in Chennai and Tamil Nadu, and today, across the country. REACH's contributions to the NTEP have been significant, including establishing one of the first public-private partnership models in Chennai, way back in 1999.

In 2016, REACH demonstrated, for the first time in India, a robust mechanism of engaging TB survivors, whose participation is essential in our efforts to end TB. Today, we are scaling up the TB Champion model across all the states in the country and India is proud to be one of the first countries to institutionalise engagement of TB-affected communities. Trained TB Champions are playing an important role by providing peer support to people with TB and their families, helping to address stigma and discrimination, educating their communities and providing feedback to the programme.

REACH was also the first organisation to undertake the Communities, Rights and Gender assessments; this subsequently paved the way for the NTEP's National Framework for a Gender-responsive approach to TB, making India one of the first ever high-burden TB countries to have such a strategy in place. They continue to support us in the implementation of this ambitious framework.

Through their innovative efforts, REACH has shown that it is possible to 'engage the unengaged' for TB, by involving several other important stakeholders including the news media, industries, elected representatives, youth leaders etc. REACH has also shown the spotlight and helped the NTEP build an evidence base for intersectional issues such as TB and Disability and TB in the elderly.

I am confident that the dynamic REACH team will not rest on their laurels, and will continue to endeavour to support us in our efforts to achieve TB elimination in India. I wish them all the very best for the years to come.



(Dr. Rajendra P Joshi)

SPECIAL MESSAGE

25 years ago, when REACH was born, I was privileged to be involved in a small way, as a member of the advisory group. Since then, I have seen REACH grow from strength to strength, and become a large, successful, effective, and global organization that has become a role model for other organizations engaged in people-centered TB care and private provider engagement.

Today, everyone in TB accepts the importance of engaging all healthcare providers in TB care. But this was not the case 25 years ago. Nearly three decades ago, REACH understood the reality of India's healthcare landscape, and saw great potential in harnessing the potential of the country's large private and NGO health sector. REACH also understood the importance of meeting people where they are, and ensuring that all people get quality care, regardless of where they seek care. Most importantly, REACH understood the need for long-term, sustained efforts to tackle TB.

In 2024, India continues to have the highest TB burden amongst all countries, accounting for nearly a third of the incident TB cases and deaths globally. However, the situation is improving. India has shown high-level political commitment for ending TB and is implementing an ambitious National Strategic Plan to End TB, with substantial increases in domestic budget. India has made good progress in the past years with private provider engagement, and the country has also invested in new tools. Today, several Indian companies are manufacturing tests, vaccines and medicines.

But India cannot end TB by relying only on the public sector. All sectors can and must contribute. Organizations such as REACH play a critical role in India's success, and I wish REACH all success in keeping up the fight against TB.



Prof Madhukar Pai, MD, PhD, FRSC
 Inaugural Chair, Department of Global & Public Health
 McGill School of Population and Global Health
 January 2024

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 Stop TB Partnership
 Global Health Campus
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 1218 Grand-Saconnex
 Geneva, Switzerland



26 March 2024, Geneva, Switzerland

Subject: REACH 25th anniversary message

Dear REACH colleagues,

We, Stop TB Partnership, as we champion and support people affected by TB, their networks and organizations and as we lead and fund work on communities, rights and gender in TB response, are extremely happy with the joint efforts and partnership with our friends and colleagues from REACH.

REACH has been pioneering person-centered care for people with TB through many different grants funded by Stop TB Partnership's TB REACH initiative. REACH is currently scaling a model that they have developed to provide support to people with drug resistant TB through TB Champions, people who have successfully completed treatment and can help people with newly diagnosed disease navigate a complicated and daunting journey. The backing of TB Champions has ensured that loss to follow-up has dropped to virtually zero, and financial, educational and emotional support are being provided to hundreds of people with drug resistant TB. Previous work has included novel approaches to engaging the private sector in scaling up screening of contacts of people with TB, and a women empowered intervention to spearhead TB prevention and care.

In addition, REACH, together with the India NTP, were one of the pioneers of the Stop TB Partnership TB Community, Rights and Gender Assessment tool that identifies and analyses barriers that people face in accessing TB diagnosis, treatment, care and support. Usually, these barriers stem from law and policy, human rights, gender and status of key and vulnerable groups. This initiative laid significant progress in India, with the national TB and Gender Strategy and Stigma Strategy being a notable multi sectoral initiative led by the India National TB Program, responding to the evidenced garnered through this initiative from REACH.

At 25 years of existence, REACH is a strong, reliable, trustworthy and extremely professional organization with amazing people that care and are devoted to improve the lives of those less lucky, suffering because of TB. We are happy and honoured to work together and I know that we will end TB!"

Sincerely,



Dr Lucica Ditiu, Executive Director, Stop TB Partnership

SPECIAL MESSAGE

On behalf of the team at USAID/India, it gives me great pleasure to extend our heartfelt congratulations to REACH. 25 years is a landmark moment in any organisation's history and the REACH team can be proud of what they have achieved in these two and a half decades, from a small pilot in Chennai to a pan-India presence today.

Those of us who have working on TB for a long time will remember a time when the involvement of communities was virtually non-existent. In general, TB approaches globally have tended to be top-down; until recently, no one asked people with TB – those who actually had a first-hand experience of the disease – what they wanted and how we could change the status quo. I recall when REACH first floated the idea of engaging TB survivors back in 2015, there were skeptics, but they have been proven wrong.

Over the last few years, REACH has not only taught us the importance of listening to and learning from TB-affected communities but also shown in action what this bottom-up approach can look like. This has set the stage for a paradigm shift, not just in India but globally, for the genuine involvement and participation of communities. Most recently, REACH has also shone a spotlight on various aspects of equity and diversity in the TB context, through their pioneering work on TB and gender, and their recent efforts to draw attention to those most vulnerable, including people with disabilities and the elderly.

Throughout this remarkable journey, the REACH team has been unafraid to try new ideas, to take risks, to push the boundaries of what is possible, and show the way for a more inclusive response to TB in India. I wish REACH many more decades of excellence in public health.

Dr. Reuben Swamickan

Deputy Director, Health Office
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/India
February 2024

SPECIAL MESSAGE

On behalf of the TB team at WHO/India, I am pleased to congratulate REACH on the occasion of their 25th anniversary. Since their inception, REACH has been a relentless force in India's fight against TB, committed to ensuring that every single person with TB receives the highest quality of care possible.

When REACH first began back in 1999, the problem was clear. Even with free services available in the public sector, people with TB turned to the private sector. REACH's ingenious interface model – one of the first globally – bridged the gap, connecting the public system with private providers and people with TB. It laid the foundation for early diagnosis, free and quality treatment, and high treatment completion rates among people with TB.

While REACH continues to provide comprehensive TB services to people with TB across 30 private hospitals in Chennai, they never stopped innovating. Continuously pushing boundaries, they have pioneered ground-breaking approaches, including the TB Champion model. By empowering affected communities to become TB Champions, REACH created a network of peer support, offering invaluable person-centred care and support. Today, TB Champions work all over the country and are active stakeholders in the TB elimination programme. Their success is a testament to the transformative potential of community ownership in addressing a disease fuelled by social inequities.

REACH recognises how TB intersects with various social determinants. They have been instrumental in not only shaping but also implementing a national framework for a gender-responsive approach to TB. They have also initiated critical dialogues on the disproportionate impact of TB on the elderly and individuals with disabilities, highlighting issues such as access to care, side effects of TB drugs, and social support systems among others. I have especially admired their Women TB Leader initiative, empowering women from the community with the knowledge and skills to become powerful local leaders and educate people about TB.

For 25 years, REACH has been a champion for equity in the fight against TB. They have not just treated the disease; they have addressed the root causes that make some communities more vulnerable. Let us celebrate their achievements and continue building a TB-free future.

Dr. Ranjani Ramachandran

National Professional Officer (TB)
World Health Organisation
February 2024

SPECIAL MESSAGE

Down memory lane

In 1993, the WHO declared that TB was a 'Global Emergency'. The Government of India's Revised National TB Control Programme or RNTCP was launched in 1998 to address the critical issues in TB control.

It was in that year that a meeting was organised at The Hindu office boardroom to discuss the issue of TB as a challenge to public health in India. I was in awe at that time at the calibre of the discussions, which was presided over by Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, eminent agricultural scientist; Mr. N. Ram, Mr. N. Ravi and other Directors from The Hindu, Dr. P. R. Narayanan, Director of the then Tuberculosis Research Center (TRC) and many other dignitaries. Dr. Narayanan spoke about the urgent need for private sector participation in combating TB. At the end of that inspiring meeting, we all collectively resolved to do something about combating TB head on. It was then that 'ACT' or Advocacy for Control of TB was born with a group of committed members supported by three social workers, of whom Ms. Sheela Augustine still remains the backbone of the organisation today.

I remember vividly the initial meetings filled with a lot of passion that laid the foundation of our work that was needed to combat the deadly TB disease. Many meetings were held in the home of Ms. Sudha Ravi. I am very grateful now for all that hospitality!

One of the most important challenges was to get the private general practitioners to participate in the RNTCP. Many, including myself, were initially sceptical of anything to do with the Government. Each of the private doctors had their own idea of medication and treatment. The medicines that were prescribed were inadequate and ineffective. Countless programmes were organised involving GPs with extensive support from the TRC. Slowly almost all doctors in Chennai started adopting the govt prescribed RNTCP with correct medication and standardised regime. Winning the support of private practitioners was one of the greatest successes of ACT at that time.

The other important aspect of combating TB was in involving the community. I remember the innumerable meetings in various slums of Chennai engaging with communities and talking to them about TB and how to control the spread. I felt it was easier to convince the common people than doctors! I cannot forget the many public meetings where so many people participated. I can remember their beaming smiles and gratefulness after being cured of TB. ACT was slowly growing from strength to strength with more and more people participating actively and I can say for sure that many lives were saved.

The other major challenge for ACT was to abolish the stigma attached to tuberculosis. It was sad to see many young mothers being turned away from their homes after being infected with tuberculosis. This deep stigma had to be removed from society. An intervention using the power of media and film stars such as actors Suhasini and Suriya was used to dispel the misinformation about TB. I know that stigma still exists but it is much better than in the past. I think now people realise that TB is just another bacterial infection with a definite cure.

I remember with fondness the many meetings with Dr. M. S. Swaminathan who was our Chairman for many years. He was very supportive of all our efforts. He always stressed the importance of good nutritional support for patients on treatment for TB. Thanks to him, policy makers and doctors now have included this important aspect into the total care of the person with TB.

The other important person in our journey was Dr. Narayanan, who was the Director of TRC at the time. His help in the formative stages was crucial in setting up the plan of action for the fight against TB. He was present at innumerable meetings and was a good communicator. He could easily address people and help in spreading the message of the Government clearly. The other compassionate doctor was Dr. Kumaraswami. He was a very knowledgeable and helpful person and a great problem solver. It was a delight to get to know him during the many meetings over the years and we miss his presence deeply. The other doctors from TRC - the soft spoken and always humble Dr. Shantha Devi, Drs Jawahar, Rajeshwari and Rani - were always available to help in many doctors' programs. Dr. Arjun Rajagopalan, a committee member was an inspiration for me, and I always remember his valuable advice saying that the best medical research should reach and benefit the common man.

Dr. Nalini Krishnan who was the first Project Director and co-founder anchored REACH as an outstanding leader, and carried forward the vision of ACT which was registered as REACH in 1999 and propelled it to the present position of leadership in the fight against TB in Chennai and now all over India. I have seen her interact with local communities and with senior health officials from Delhi, with equal ease and with conviction!. Her contribution has truly transformed and saved many lives.

25 years have flown by, and REACH is truly flourishing with young and energetic leaders such as Dr. Ramya Ananthakrishnan. I can see the same passion and energy in their eyes. Good luck to all to continue the fight against TB.



Dr. S. Sivamurugan

Founding Member & Executive Committee Member, REACH
January 2024

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

As we celebrate 25 remarkable years of REACH, it is with immense pride and gratitude that I extend my heartfelt greetings to you. Turning the pages of this book is akin to traversing a landscape sculpted by hope. Each photo, each story, each milestone etched within its pages resonates with the echoes of countless lives transformed – a testament to the unwavering spirit of REACH and the unyielding power of collective action. We've demolished barriers, challenged biases, and ensured that quality care no longer remains a distant dream to the most vulnerable groups.

The 'TB Champions', offering peer support with the warmth of lived experience; the 'Nanbans', transforming TB care; the 'DOTS Providers', dispensing medication with compassion; 'Network Leaders', forging connections; 'Women TB Leaders', exemplifying resilience and leadership; 'Community Volunteers' as architects of change; 'People with TB', contributing to the collective strength of our mission; 'Media Fellows', fostering awareness, dispelling myths, and catalysing impactful action. Together, these diverse faces form the living embodiment of REACH's commitment to a people-centric approach, where compassion, resilience, and collaboration intertwine to redefine the narrative on TB.

The 25 voices you encounter within these pages are not just individual narratives; they are woven into the fabric of a collective dream. Their resilience is our compass, their courage our guide as we forge ahead, embracing new tools, forging stronger partnerships, and pushing the boundaries of what's possible. But the true essence of REACH lies not in numbers, but in the transformative power of human connection. The 25 stories woven into this narrative represent the countless individuals who have become beacons of hope in their communities.

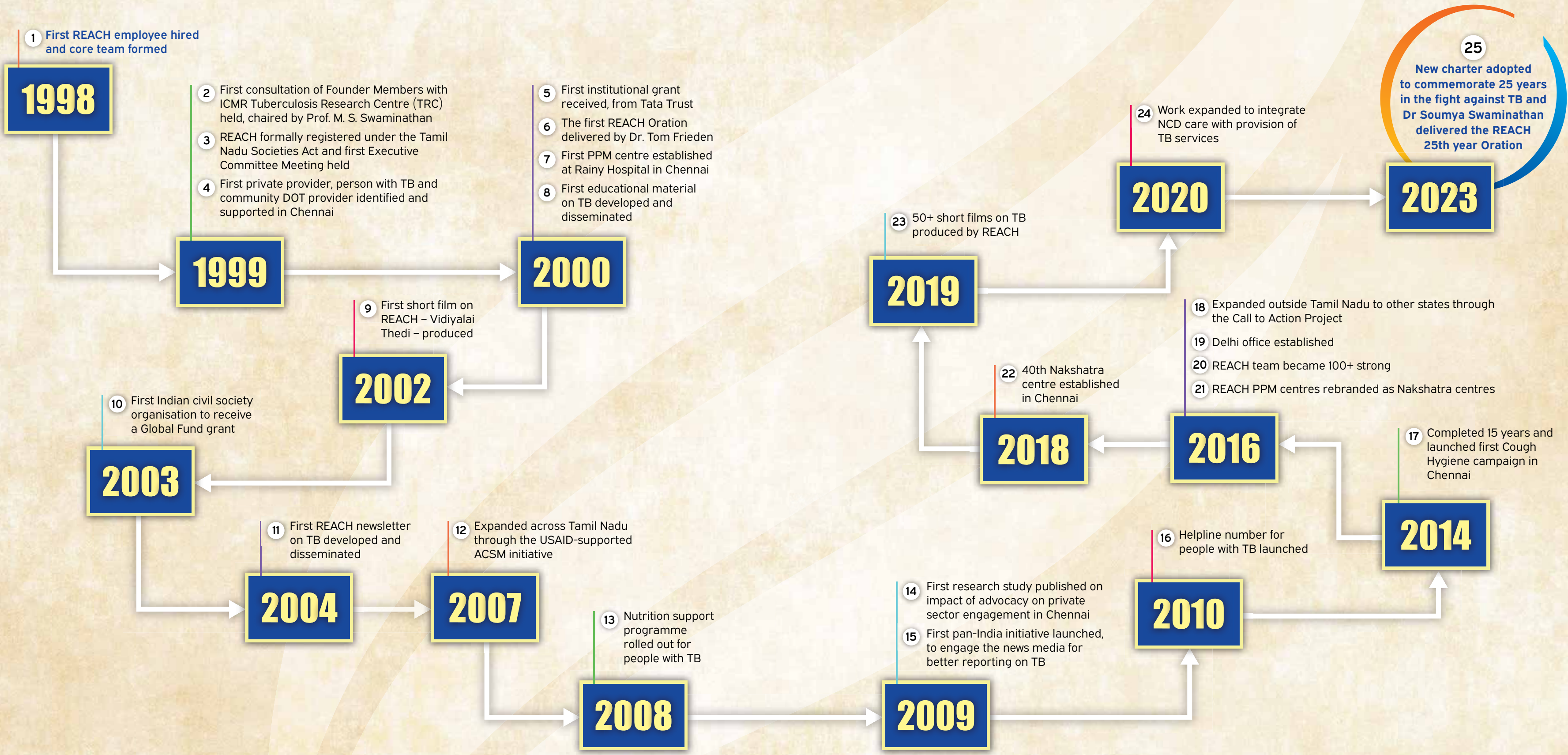
Looking ahead, my heart swells with both gratitude and responsibility – to carry this legacy forward, to keep reaching further, to ensure that no voice is left unheard, and no life is left behind in the fight against inequity. We recognise the need to address a wider spectrum of public health issues, acknowledging that our communities face multifaceted challenges that extend beyond TB. The inequities that plague our healthcare system are stark and with every breath, we commit to pushing them further back. Through innovation, research, advocacy and collaborative action, we will ensure that every individual, regardless of their background or circumstance, has the opportunity to thrive.

On this occasion, on behalf of all of us at REACH, I express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Nalini Krishnan for her compassionate outlook, visionary leadership and unstinting mentorship. I also thank our Executive Committee for all their steadfast support and guidance and all our donors and supporters who have stood by us and backed our dreams. Finally, my heartfelt gratitude to the entire REACH team, who in all their diversities and through their collective efforts have made the organisation what it is today. Thank you.



Dr. Ramya Ananthakrishnan

Director, REACH
January 2024



25 YEARS

**25 LIVES
WE'VE TOUCHED**

Arti Kumari

TB Champion: Suffocating Stigma to Confident Leadership

The celebratory fanfare quickly faded into a deafening hush as a newly married Arti grappled with the news that her husband had been diagnosed with TB. "It's better if you leave. He won't survive," her father-in-law's pronouncement hung heavy in the air, severing the fragile ties of hope.

Cast out by their family and ostracised by neighbours, Arti battled her own multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) diagnosis amidst suffocating stigma. "I, too, was diagnosed with TB a few months later. The once familiar faces would now walk away whenever they saw us. I wasn't even allowed to use the community tap," she recalls. "Neighbours suggested we sleep on the railway tracks."

"TB slammed into my life like a rogue wave, shattering my confidence along with our already fragile finances," she says and explains how she could not get a job because of her health condition. "I had lost all hope."

"Then came REACH. Meeting other TB survivors who carried the same burden, sharing stories and laughter, chipped away at the self-doubt," Arti recalls, her voice carrying the gratitude she feels for the organisation that has become her anchor. The fear loosened its grip and reignited her confidence, and then there was no looking back.

Her work as a TB Champion garnered a well-deserved recognition and Arti became an integral part of the Bihar network, TB Mukh Vahini. Next was a foray into a public health career as District Coordinator for a REACH project in drug-resistant TB in Muzaffarpur, from February 2022 onwards. Today, Arti guides a team of TB Champions who provide guided and personalised support to people with DRTB in Bihar to reduce the pretreatment loss to follow-up. She mentors them as they weave through narrow lanes, past shuttered windows and curious eyes, armed with stories of hope and knowledge gleaned from hard-won battles.

Arti's leadership journey has taken a powerful turn: from honing her skills to championing fellow survivors. "When I go into the community with my team," Arti says, "I can engage with any local representatives – be it an MLA or PRI member – without any hesitation."



"If I hadn't joined REACH, I wouldn't have been able to lead this kind of life. I wouldn't have been able to repay our loans," she exclaims, adding, "REACH bhavnao ke saath ek vyakti ko nikhaarta hai aur unhen saksham, sikshit, aur sher banata hai (REACH not only provides emotional support but also empowers individuals, making them resilient, educated, and confident.)"

A Gayathri

TB Nanban: Nourishing Hope, Fostering Resilience

REACH has established a network of nearly 50 Nakshatra Centres across Chennai, each located within a private hospital to provide a full range of TB services under one roof, making it easier for people with symptoms of TB to access the care they need. Each Nakshatra Centre is staffed by a trained healthcare worker called 'TB Nanban', who provides them with personalised counselling and support, helping them navigate the treatment process and overcome any challenges they may face. All services provided by REACH at the Nakshatra Centres are free of cost. This ensures that everyone, regardless of their financial situation, can access the care they need.

Gayathri is one such TB Nanban who has been working at the Nakshatra Centre in M.S. Nursing Home in Villivakkam for the last six years. She balances her work life with the joys and challenges of raising two children. "Seeing the strength and resilience of people with TB facing such difficult battles motivates me to find the courage to face my own challenges head-on," she says.

Upon joining REACH, it wasn't just about the financial support she received. It was the chance to connect with people, engage, and make a meaningful impact in their lives.

Empowered by her work as a TB Nanban, she has unlocked the secrets of healthy eating, nourishing herself and her family with knowledge and vitality.

"My table is filled with home-cooked food and there are no loans to taint the taste. I still can't afford to eat out, but I can now provide for my children's needs as an independent single mother. In my prayers, I don't seek more; I simply count my blessings."

My landlord, Gayathri says, is dumbfounded by my ability to manage everything at home and consistently pay rent on the first of each month. "REACH feels more like family than my relatives ever have."

"In the depths of physical and mental breakdowns, in the moments of utter wreckage, it is the support I find at REACH that empowers me to rise and keep going. When travelling, I find comfort in knowing that my children will be taken care of in case of any emergency," she adds.



Binay Patra

TB Champion: Using Art & Advocacy to End Stigma

Binay Patra knows firsthand the struggles of battling TB. Diagnosed in 2019, he faced not only the physical challenges of the disease but also the social stigma associated with it. "I was extremely weak and had to be admitted to the district hospital for 20 days. People kept saying that I won't recover from TB," he recalls.

But Binay wasn't one to throw in the towel. After completing six months of treatment, he emerged not just as a TB survivor but a Champion. "REACH completely transformed my life," he says, reflecting on his journey. "Since the training, I have raised awareness, provided support to individuals with TB, and travelled to numerous places. These opportunities have brought about a significant transformation in my personality." The community now looks up to him, and his family, once concerned about his health, now stands proud of his accomplishments.

But Binay's impact extends beyond individual support. As an artist, he uses his creativity to raise awareness about TB in his community. His 300+ wall paintings, now adorning the walls of villages across 17 Panchayats in his block, are a vibrant testament to his dedication.

"I used to find only odd jobs in my village," Binay recalls. "However, REACH acknowledged my talent and leveraged it for TB awareness on a broader scale. With their support, I recently secured a wall-painting project from the District Magistrate (DM) office to promote TB awareness across 100 villages in Mayurbhanj, Odisha."

Reflecting on the past, Binay associates the onset of TB with a period of smoking and regular drinking, aggravated by the inhaling of dust from a local steel factory where he worked. "I quit cold turkey," he proudly states, highlighting how his decision influenced even his family members to adopt a healthier lifestyle. "Soon after my diagnosis, even my brother and uncle stopped drinking," he adds.

Looking ahead, Binay dreams of further honing his artistic skills. While he is already adept at wall painting, he expresses a desire to learn sketching. With continued support from REACH, he hopes to pursue this artistic ambition while balancing his responsibilities as a husband and father.



Binay's paintings tackle not only the symptoms and spread of TB but also the crucial issue of stigma. He depicts government services and schemes available to patients, aiming to bridge the gap between healthcare and the community and improve health-seeking behaviour.



K Indrasithu

Pharmacist: Turning Pharmacies into TB Information Hubs

Indrasithu is a familiar face in Pulianthope, Chennai. He has been reading prescriptions and handing out pills behind the counter of the same pharmacy store for the last 45 years. However, the rhythm of his routine was disrupted in 2013 when he came down with a heart disease. Admitted to a local hospital, he faced not only the challenge of his ailment but had undergone a drastic weight loss. The routine TB test that followed confirmed his worst fears: a diagnosis of pulmonary TB.

Earlier that year, Indrasithu had attended a TB awareness meeting organised by REACH for pharmacists and was encouraged to distribute TB awareness pamphlets to customers exhibiting symptoms. Little did he know that these informational leaflets would play a critical role in his own life. As the pamphlets found their way to his pharmacy, his wife's astute eye recognised a chilling parallel in her husband's condition. "She immediately contacted REACH," recalls Indrasithu, "and they connected me with TB Nanban Deena at CSI Rainy Hospital, starting my journey towards recovery."

The road to recovery was fraught with challenges as Indrasithu found it difficult to

manage regular medication and the prescribed injections. But the TB Nanban emerged as a pillar of support. "She visited me often, emphasising the importance of completing the treatment and guiding us through medication and diet plans," remembers Indrasithu.

"Every week, Deena would deliver medicines, collect empty packets, and offer words of encouragement," says Indrasithu. "It was her commitment that helped me to complete the treatment and overcome TB. I owe my life to her and REACH."

His gratitude translated into action. Indrasithu actively involves REACH in drug and chemist association meetings, creating awareness about TB. "If I encounter anyone with symptoms," he asserts, "I immediately redirect them to Nakshatra Centres, and encourage fellow pharmacists to do the same."

"So far, I have been able to save six lives, two of whom are fellow pharmacists," Indrasithu says with pride. "I pledge to continue being a social activist, collaborating with REACH in the ongoing fight against TB."



B Chinmayee

TB Champion: Bringing Dreams Closer to Reality

Chinmayee, a gifted classical dancer from Odisha's Berhampur district, saw her dreams take a devastating turn in 2017. TB left her motionless in a hospital bed, stripping away not just her ability to dance but also the joy of impending motherhood. Her husband and his family, rather than providing support, heaped verbal abuse and blamed her for her illness. They refused treatment, abandoned her in the hospital, and ultimately, threw her out of their home.

With unwavering support from her father, Chinmayee completed her treatment and was determined to lead a normal life. But her world had shrunk to the four walls of her room and her disability a cage built by societal stigma. REACH emerged as a key, unlocking that cage and revealing a universe of possibilities.

"Attending the (TB survivor to TB Champion) workshop in 2018 was like stepping into the sunlight after a long, oppressive night," Chinmayee recalls, her voice laced with the echoes of past confinement. "I couldn't move like I used to, but REACH helped me realise the power of my voice." Over the ensuing six months, she extended psycho-social support to more than 100 people with TB and organised 30-35 awareness meetings across schools, women's groups, and youth gatherings, urging those with symptoms to seek medical care.

When the lockdown shuttered her father's dance school, Chinmayee rose to the challenge and found employment at a local pharmacy store to support her family during trying times. "Thanks to my work as a TB Champion, I discovered a courage I never knew I possessed," she says, her voice ringing with quiet pride. "It helped me face the lockdown's hardships head-on, not just for myself, but for my family, too."

It isn't easy, juggling long hours with her ongoing physiotherapy. But for Chinmayee it's a step towards a brighter future. "Inside my house, I don't need help," she adds. "I can manage. But I want to be independent. I want to be able to walk on my own two feet, to go to work without anyone having to worry about me."



"Two fires burn within me," Chinmayee declares. "One, to extinguish the flames of TB that ravaged me, and the other, to reclaim the joy of dancing once again. I want to dance – just one more time – for those silenced by TB, for my own strength, and for a future where no one has to choose between health and their dreams."

B Devi

Woman TB Leader: Transforming Barriers into Runways for Change

Until 2020, Devi rarely left her home. When she did step out, she always rode pillion on her husband's motorcycle. She never dared to go alone, fearing she would be lost in the overwhelming maze of the outside world.

This changed in 2020 when Devi began working with REACH as a Woman TB Leader in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. She would often organise community meetings on TB in remote rural areas with limited access to public transportation. To overcome this challenge, she saved her monthly honorarium until she could afford a scooty.

Soon, Devi was zipping through the town she once barely knew. Street names, once a blur, etched themselves onto her mind like a map to freedom. The roads in her hometown became her runway, with each community outreach to far-flung villages marking a flight towards transformation. The rumble of her trusted scooty had replaced the silence.

Besides conducting community meetings, she would also identify people with symptoms of TB. Determined to overcome access barriers, Devi mastered the art of sputum sample collection and handling. "I would personally transport the samples to the nearest Tuberculosis Unit (TU) to ensure accurate and prompt TB diagnosis even in remote areas," says Devi.

Though the project may have ended, Devi's commitment to TB awareness has not. She is still in close contact with the local TB programme team and continues to identify people with symptoms from among those who come to her ration shop. The once-reclusive Devi also stays connected with other women TB leaders in the district, engaging in the occasional banter and sharing on their Whatsapp group.



Dhaneshwari Yadav

TB Champion: Going the Extra Mile for Her Community

Hailing from a rural background in Durg, Chhattisgarh, Dhaneshwari Yadav confronted societal expectations head-on when she was married off at the age of 13. Five years later, while expecting her child, both husband and wife were diagnosed with TB, following which their newborn had to undergo TB treatment. In 2009, her life took another painful turn when both she and her husband were diagnosed with HIV. Undeterred by adversity, Yadav transformed her plight into purpose, becoming an HIV/AIDS advocate in Raipur. Despite losing her husband in 2018, she persisted in her advocacy until 2019, when family commitments, including caring for her ailing mother-in-law and raising her two young sons, compelled her to resign.

Two years later, she joined REACH. As a TB Champion, Dhaneshwari provides essential counselling and support for people with TB. Her multifaceted approach extends to linking them with vital social schemes, spearheading awareness programs, and steadfastly ensuring the recognition of their rights.

“In Durg, a mason who was diagnosed with TB suffered a tragic fall from a terrace, resulting in the amputation of his legs,” Dhaneshwari recalls. “But I was shocked to see him back doing the same job. That visual has forever been etched in my memory.” Touched by his plight, Dhaneshwari and her team connected with a Rotary Club camp. Dhaneshwari’s persuasive efforts prevailed, and the mason received prosthetic limbs within two days. Overjoyed, he called her, “Ma’am, please see, I’ve started walking.”

Driven by a desire to make a difference, Dhaneshwari doesn’t hesitate to go the extra mile. And this was recently evident when she supported 20 members of the transgender community. Beyond facilitating their TB diagnosis and treatment, she actively helped them secure vital documents like Transgender ID cards, ration cards, and Aadhaar cards, enabling them to access government services.

“Every district of Chhattisgarh that I tread through with REACH is a stepping stone to the world I dream of exploring,” she says. “And while my path may not yet lead me across oceans, my work helps real people, forging a trail of recognition that spans continents.”



From a once-muted existence, confined to societal norms and within a ‘ghoonghat’, Dhaneshwari now stands tall as a Champion, confidently addressing audiences of 200+ people. “My life has undergone a seismic shift. I’m not just fighting for my rights; I’m fighting for others, too,” she declares.



Dr Janani Shankar

**Private Practitioner: Facilitating
Access to Free TB Care**

Dr Janani Shankar is a seasoned paediatrician and Medical Director at Kanchi Kamakoti Childs Trust Hospital in Chennai, where she has been working for the last three decades, ensuring the well-being of the youngest members of the community.

“Managing paediatric TB proved to be an even more formidable task within the private sector,” she reflects. “Pharmacies struggled to maintain a sufficient stock of TB medicines, and even when they did, they typically carried only one or two of the four required medications. This situation often compelled parents to run from pillar to post, adding to their distress.”

Adherence was further hampered by the lack of proper dosage forms available for children. “Imagine a 6kg child needing Anti-Tuberculosis Treatment (ATT) for six months! Calculating and procuring the right amount of dosage was a real headache,” she remarks, noting that the partnership with REACH has allowed the hospital to focus more on the clinical aspect of their work.

“REACH streamlined everything,” she beams. “When we identify children with TB symptoms, we refer them to TB Nanban at the Nakshatra Centre, and REACH takes care of the entire process.”

From facilitating diagnosis and providing medication to ensuring treatment adherence and successful completion, REACH provides an end-to-end solution, including handling government notifications via the Ni-kshay portal. “And the beauty of it all is that all these services are completely free,” she points out.

“REACH also provides free screenings for people with TB and their contacts. This early detection is invaluable, stopping the spread in its tracks and reducing the burden significantly, both in adults and children,” she remarks. TB Nanbans go beyond their call of duty to connect those with drug-resistant strains to DR-TB Centres and also follow up with children of migrants from other states or districts.

As Dr Janani looks toward the future, she envisions an even greater role for REACH in addressing the evolving challenges of paediatric TB. With the rise in drug-resistant strains and the unvaccinated status of many children due to socio-economic factors, she believes REACH’s commitment to facilitating access to free, high-quality screening and diagnosis, and establishing linkages for treatment will play a vital role in mitigating these challenges.



G Suguna

Woman TB Leader: Personal and Professional Empowerment

Shunned by family after a love marriage, Suguna felt adrift and dedicated her life to working as a lab technician in a government hospital. But everything changed after her training with REACH. Transformed into a Woman TB Leader, Suguna became a catalyst for change, steering numerous individuals through TB treatment. The isolation that once shrouded her began to dissipate as she formed bonds with grateful people with TB, forging a new network of connection and gaining a deep sense of satisfaction.

Suguna never considered herself tech-savvy. But when the work demanded a shift from a “button phone” to a smartphone, she not only embraced the change but mastered it.

Challenges only seemed to fuel Suguna’s fire. When family troubles and the pandemic threatened her livelihood, REACH stood as a pillar of support, ensuring she remained employed and her salary was paid in full. This unwavering support fuelled her determination to go above and beyond. She mastered complex TB testing machines, expediting TB diagnoses and reducing delays.

This newfound confidence spilled over into her personal life. She learned to ride a two-wheeler, conquering geographical barriers in her fight against TB. Suguna, once trembling at the thought of public speaking, now fearlessly leads community meetings. “With the support from REACH, I learned to speak fearlessly and conduct community outreach activities on my own,” she says.

Most significantly, Suguna transformed from a hesitant homemaker to a confident decision-maker. People sought her advice on health, and her husband, once the sole provider, became a proud partner. This newfound agency even led her to the political arena. “The community urged me to run for the local Panchayat elections,” she says, “from a shy woman to a candidate – that’s the impact REACH has had on my life!”

Though she didn’t win, this experience solidified her resolve to make a difference. “I’ll be back,” she declares, “determined to use my power to change lives.”



“I would attend online meetings, collect data using a mobile app, and stay connected with the team,” she says and goes on to explain how the humble device helped her children with their schoolwork during the pandemic. Now, she navigates the digital realm with confidence, attributing her new job to the mobile data collection skills acquired through REACH.

Dr J Jayanth

Private Practitioner: Building Partnerships for Holistic Care

Back in 2002, CSI Kalyani Hospital in Chennai was among the first private hospitals where REACH set up a Nakshatra Centre to provide person-centred care to individuals with symptoms of TB.

Dr. J. Jerene Jayanth, the Medical Director at the hospital, points out that the information gap and the stigma surrounding TB act as barriers for people with symptoms to seek care in government hospitals. In private settings, a majority resort to 'doctor shopping'. "This partial treatment, a ticking time bomb for drug-resistant strains, was a constant worry. REACH changed that."

"After referring a person with TB to the Nakshatra Centre, we don't need to worry about them being lost to follow-up," he assures. "REACH not only supplies free drugs available in government hospitals but also guarantees consistent follow-up. The TB Nanbans, with their personalised counselling and support, guide people with TB through the treatment journey and address any challenges they might encounter."

Dr Jayanth is particularly impressed by REACH's workforce and envisions a future where the collaborative spirit continues to thrive. **"Their motivation is infectious," he exclaims. "TB Nanbans understand the impact of their work, the families they save, the lives they change. It's truly inspiring." He praises the leadership, crediting it for maintaining this remarkable level of dedication.**

There were never any concerns about losing patients to Nakshatra Centres. "The space couldn't have been put to a better use. We are able to improve treatment adherence and patient follow-up, thereby increasing the goodwill and reputation of the hospital. It's a mutually beneficial synergy, a win-win for both of us," he adds.

Sheela Augustine, Deputy Director at REACH, says that Dr Jayanth has always provided invaluable support to the Nakshatra Centre. "Not only does he offer free seminar halls for TB Nanbans' discussions and meetings, but he ensures his entire staff, even nursing students, receive comprehensive TB training," she remarks, emphasising his invaluable role in the ongoing fight against TB.



Imran Ali

Media Fellow: Shaping Conversations on Public Health Issues

In the sun-drenched villages of Odisha, Dr Md Imran Ali wasn't always wielding a pen. For over 15 years now, he has toiled in the trenches of the development sector, his social work degree guiding him towards helping the vulnerable and championing public health. From humble byways to bustling community centres, his work has touched upon a multitude of issues – the fight against cancer, the protection of child rights, the curbing of tobacco use, and the battle against climate change. Then, in 2015, a chance encounter with REACH and his dedication to social work intersected with the pressing need to combat a deadly disease: Tuberculosis (TB).

Dr Ali's journey with REACH began as a mentor for six TB Champions in different districts of Odisha. "I was first given training on TB symptoms, treatment regimens and the stigma related to the disease," he recalls. Armed with newfound knowledge, he dove headfirst into awareness campaigns, guiding these grassroots champions towards impactful community meetings and advocacy. "The experience was transformative."

Meanwhile, he continued to write in local newspapers and online publications as a freelance journalist; and in 2020, he received the REACH Media Fellowship for Reporting on TB. "The two-day training was rigorous. We had sessions with leading public health experts, researchers and NTEP officials on various subjects, such as the TB care cascade, comorbidities, nutrition, stigma, government schemes and the latest TB data," he says.

As Dr Ali embarked on a quest for impactful narratives, he came across Laxman Honaga, a TB survivor from a tribal community.

The story, penned with empathy and journalistic rigour, received accolades from the jury members as Dr Ali climbed the stairs to receive the REACH Media Award for Excellence in TB Reporting in 2020-21. "It was heartwarming," Imran says, pausing for a moment to collect his thoughts. "Journalists from other publications contacted me to get in touch with Laxman to amplify his story. The State TB Officer (STO) only had words of praise for Laxman."

Beyond the spotlight of awards and accolades, Dr Ali remains fiercely connected to the grassroots. Through the Kalinga TB Survivors Network, a tight-knit WhatsApp group buzzing with shared experiences and support, he stays close to the pulse of the struggle. He often meets with state health officials to ensure that community voices resonate in the corridors of power, bridging the gap between lived experiences and policy decisions.

Dr Ali's engagement with REACH is a testament to what is possible when we embrace a collaborative approach to TB healthcare. It's an invitation to replicate this win-win model: to empower journalists, communities, and governments to work hand-in-hand, ensuring that healthcare battles are fought not just on paper, but in the hearts and homes of those who need it most.



"In rural communities, TB typically carries a heavy societal stigma. But my visit to the Jollimunda Sahi slums of Bhubaneswar revealed that people with TB faced no such discrimination. Upon further investigation, I found out about Laxman, who had not only crushed stigma in the unlikeliest of places but also saved the lives of 40 people with TB in his community."



N Vijayakumari

TB Nanban: Pioneering Person-Centred Care & Support

Vijayakumari endured a harrowing marriage. Her husband's insatiable addiction to gambling left them with nothing as he recklessly pawned away all their possessions. This led to a cycle of heated arguments, leaving her trapped in a perpetual state of emotional torment. Eventually, she reached a breaking point and made the courageous decision to separate.

However, navigating the path of single parenthood brought its own set of challenges. She had to juggle three part-time jobs to support not only her two teenage children but also her disabled parents.

But the meagre and delayed paychecks only added to her anguish. The spectre of providing the next meal for her family loomed large, and the dream of educating her children seemed unreachable, prompting her to reflect on the depth of her struggle: "I had lost all hope in life."

However, the winds of change blew in 2019 when she secured a position as a TB Nanban with REACH.

Recalling this pivotal moment, she shared, "As soon as I got a job in REACH, I borrowed some money and ensured that my son continued his higher studies. My daughter also resumed college. With the newfound job security, I could finally chart a course for my life, on my terms."

At present, she oversees three Nakshatra Centres in North Chennai and provides personalised counselling and support to individuals living with TB, guiding them through the treatment journey.

She identifies closely with every person with TB that she meets, fostering a sense of community bound by shared experiences. "Overcoming personal battles has equipped me with a deep understanding of community needs. My sole objective is to be of help to others," she said, outlining her future vision as a compassionate advocate within the community.



K Jamuna

DOTS Provider: Going Above and Beyond TB Treatment

In the pulsating heart of north Chennai, where the clamour of daily life reverberates through narrow alleys, Jamuna, a widow with two children, found herself caught in the undertow of adversity. The rhythm of her existence, punctuated by the routine of a small ration shop, was disrupted by a jarring chord – an unrelenting hip pain which took the shape of spinal TB.

She was referred to the REACH Centre at CSI Rainy Hospital where she was administered DOTS medication. It was a slow climb back. “I spent the first three months bedridden,” she recalls, “but gradually, I felt better and was cured.” The “life-giving care” by REACH opened Jamuna’s eyes to the wider struggle against TB in the community.

“REACH gave me life,” she declares, “and showed me how to give life back.”

The enduring connections forged with her caregiver fuelled her passion to connect with other people with TB. “Through my experience,” Jamuna states, “I became a voice in the community, referring those in need to the REACH centre, and supporting them throughout the treatment. I became a member of the support network and would share my story without fear, knowing it could save others.”

The challenges faced by individuals dealing with TB are often compounded by stigma, as Jamuna vividly recounts. “There was this person I supported, alone and struggling with TB and alcohol. With REACH’s help, we provided medical care, food, everything, but despite our best efforts, we couldn’t save him.”



This loss underscores her conviction. “Care needs to go beyond doctors and medication; a person with TB needs love and support. REACH has taken it as a challenge to save people’s lives just like mine, and I will always be like a light guiding others to their services.”

K Jayanthi

Woman TB Leader: Finding Her Voice

"I felt alone and scared," Jayanthi said, her voice barely a whisper. "My in-laws had thrown me out and my husband had filed for separation."

The 29-year-old Jayanthi had been diagnosed with TB during her delivery, and the stigma surrounding the disease had made her life even more difficult. She sought refuge at her mother's home and started taking medication at the nearest TB Unit (TU) in Kallapurchi, Tamil Nadu.

After getting cured, she started working with REACH as a Community Health Mentor (CHM). "They saw my potential," she said, a grateful smile lighting her face. "Within months, I was promoted as a Woman TB Leader."

Despite personal hardships, she ensured that no person with TB under her care dropped out during their treatment. This is reflected in the remarkable achievement: zero deaths and zero loss to follow-up of people with TB were recorded in her Primary Health Center (PHC).

"I was helping people just like me," she said, her voice filled with pride. "I was making a difference."

But Jayanthi's impact extended beyond the TB programme. Buoyed by the confidence gained through her community work, she successfully navigated the legal complexities surrounding her separation case. "Being a Woman TB leader helped me find my voice," she said. "I learned to stand up for myself and others." In the end, her husband withdrew the case, and they are now living together again.

Her extraordinary journey has earned her the post of Health Visitor at the government hospital in Kallapurchi, an achievement that culminated when she was honoured with the Best Health Visitor Award in March 2022, on World TB Day.



Kiran Thapa

TB Champion: Nurturing Youth to Lead Fight Against TB

Kiran's days used to be confined to the pixelated glow of a computer screen. As a web designer, her social circle largely comprised a small team of colleagues and her immediate family for whom she had little time. But that was before she blossomed into a vibrant TB Champion.

TB had cast its insidious shadow during her college years and the treatment chipped away at her youth, leaving behind a sense of isolation and wasted time. Between her jobs in the subsequent years, she had always wanted to do social service. It came as no surprise when she jumped at the opportunity when REACH organised a two-day workshop for TB survivors in Dehradun in 2021.

"I went there to know more about TB," Kiran says. "But at the workshop, I discovered my calling."

The workshop provided her with insights into the multi-layered impact of TB, a revelation that fuelled her determination to spread awareness and eliminate the stigma associated with the disease. But she did not stop at that. Kiran's efforts extended beyond medical support, advocating for nutritional aid and widow pensions for affected families, embodying a holistic approach to community service.

But there were concerns. "Family and friends knew me as a web designer and found it difficult to digest that I'm working as a TB Champion and an NGO worker," she admits. However, the unwavering support from her parents became a cornerstone in her journey.

REACH's unique understanding of working with the TB community, coupled with flexible work schedules, has enabled Kiran to strike a harmonious balance between her commitment as a family caregiver and her active involvement in the fight against TB. "Being an only child, my primary motivation for leaving my IT job was to attend to my ailing parents. Thanks to REACH, I not only get the time to be with my family but also derive a deep sense of satisfaction from my work," she adds.

Kiran envisions spreading awareness about TB across Dehradun. "If I, being educated, was once unaware of TB, how can we expect others to be informed?" she asserts. "Awareness is key to ending this disease and that's where I can play an important role."



"I was shy," she admits, "but working with REACH, supporting individuals with TB and engaging with multiple stakeholders, I've overcome my hesitation. I'm no longer just Kiran, the web designer, I'm Kiran, the TB Champion."



REAL Charitable Trust

**NGOs/CBOs: Nurturing Partnerships
for Lasting Impact**

REAL Charitable Trust is among the many civil society organisations that REACH collaborated with through Project Axshya, to provide accelerated access to high-quality TB services for vulnerable and marginalised populations in Tamil Nadu. The 10-year-long project was supported by The International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease.

REAL Trust, previously unfamiliar with TB, underwent a profound transformation after their training with REACH. They started actively involving vulnerable populations in four districts – Chennai, Kancheepuram, Chengalpattu and Thiruvallur – through awareness meetings and health education campaigns. Through a series of community awareness initiatives, they sensitised the community, identified people with symptoms of TB, and facilitated the transportation of sputum samples for testing.

The training provided by REACH became a cornerstone for the NGO's growth, empowering them to address gatherings with finesse, craft comprehensive reports, develop compelling IEC materials, and submit persuasive project proposals. This holistic approach to personal and

organisational development proved instrumental in REAL Charitable Trust securing multiple grants from various funding sources.

When the pandemic stormed the world, REAL Charitable Trust showcased its agility. They drew on their Axshya experience and used effective IEC materials, creating innovative cough hygiene posters and others on COVID-19. Their proactive efforts earned appreciation from the Chennai Corporation, the state health department, and industries alike.

The organisation played a central role in forming TB forums in respective districts, where active members from the community – civil society, TB survivors, NGOs, and journalists – continue to meet every quarter to support TB-affected communities.

Their vision extends beyond financial considerations, as REAL Charitable Trust expresses a profound desire to continue collaborating with REACH reflecting an enduring partnership built on shared values.



Reji Joseph

Media Fellow: Empowering Journalists, Transforming Communities

For Kerala-based journalist Reji Joseph, his journey with REACH began in 2014, an odyssey that has woven together threads of media fellowships, accolades, and a burgeoning passion for reporting on public health issues, especially on TB.

“It was a transformative experience,” Reji beams, reflecting on his first REACH Media Fellowship in 2013-14 for reporting on TB. “The workshop broadened my horizon and opened my eyes to the expansive nature of the disease. Subject experts unveiled the myriad challenges faced by diverse demographics – from children and daily wage workers to gender-specific challenges and those within the healthcare system itself.”

Reji already had a story in mind. “Kerala welcomes a lot of migrant workers, many of whom are battling TB silently,” he notes. His meticulous investigation would go on to reveal the reality of cramped living spaces and a lack of access to healthcare in these vulnerable communities.

“The story I published resonated deeply with the government officials,” he reflects, underscoring the real-world impact that REACH’s initiatives can bring about. “It prompted the District TB Department to organise medical camps for migrant workers in Kerala. Several people with TB were identified, and interventions were initiated to curb the spread of the disease.”

For this story, Reji received the first prize at the REACH Media Awards in the regional category in 2014. This wasn’t Reji’s only brush with success. He would go on to win successive awards in 2016 and 2017 as well and earn a Media Fellowship for Reporting on Mental Health in 2020. These accolades are a testament to the impact his work has had on both local communities and national conversations about important health issues.

“Even after the Fellowship, I continue to write stories on TB and comorbidities and actively reach out to the organisation for contacts and support,” Reji adds.



“REACH’s true power lies not only in educating journalists like myself about TB but also in providing opportunities to regional reporters to share local stories that ignite change.”

Neera Devi

TB Champion: Transforming Tragedies into Triumphs

Neera's quiet life in Sultanpur (UP) was abruptly thrown into chaos when her husband contracted TB. "He fought for a year in Mumbai," Neera recalls, her voice thick with emotion, "but the illness wore him down. He wasn't getting any better." They moved to Delhi for specialised care, only to be confronted with the dreaded news that he had MDR-TB.

The sterile walls of the hospital became Neera's unwelcome home as she watched her husband wage a year-long fight against TB. A few months later, she, too, was diagnosed with MDR-TB. Between taking care of her husband, she would take 12 pills every day and vomit multiple times, all the while questioning her ability to recover.

Tragically, her husband succumbed to the emotional burden and took his own life, leaving Neera devastated. Struggling with her grief, she pressed on with her treatment, only to face a new setback when she was diagnosed with XDR-TB. "I had excruciating pain in my legs; my toes wouldn't curl. Even the slightest breeze felt like a thousand needles pricking, leaving me teetering on the edge of collapse," she recalls.

Despair threatened to engulf her, but a fierce resolve flickered within. "My children," her voice turned into a whisper, "they were my anchor."

After enduring four years of rigorous treatment and countless bouts of vomiting, Neera beat the relentless disease. It was within these depths of struggle that Neera found her purpose: to help others who are struggling with TB.

Since 2022, in her TB Champion avatar, she has been working at a REACH Support Hub in Paharganj, Delhi. From counselling people with TB to educating families about proper hygiene and treatment adherence, Neera, like a true Champion, offers them hope by sharing her own battle with TB.

Empowerment became another pillar of Neera's journey. "Now, I can travel anywhere, even outside Delhi on my own," she declares, her voice resonating with newfound confidence.

"Life seemed to have closed in on me. The illness became all-encompassing, and survival became the sole focus. Alone and engulfed by fear, I yearned to stand tall for myself and my children. I also wanted to give back to the community. REACH showed me how!"



S Poongodi

Network Leader: Inspiring Others, Transforming Lives

Poongodi's life hasn't been easy. Due to severe economic constraints, she had to cut short her formal education after 10th grade. Three episodes of TB further punctuated her life. However, the cruellest twist of fate struck when she had to endure the heartbreaking loss of her newborn child; this was followed by two miscarriages. "The doctor said that I lost all of them because of low immunity," she laments.

Though tested by life's harshest blows, Poongodi showed unparalleled resilience and fled her abusive husband and in-laws. She found strength in the badge of a TB Champion. Interacting with others who shared her journey brought her comfort while helping individuals with TB solidified a sense of belonging and purpose. Soon, she rose the ranks to become the President of the Tamil Nadu TB Survivor-led Network in October 2021.

"Through continuous capacity building and hands-on mentoring, I found my voice. REACH offered me numerous platforms and opportunities to share my experience with TB and even enrolled me on a spoken English course. This not only bolstered my public speaking confidence but also gave me a national-level platform," she says.

Today, Poongodi is a force for change, not only building the strength of fellow TB survivors but also championing the formation and strengthening of state- and district-level survivor-led networks. She actively advocates with the state NTEP team to improve the quality of care and services for people with TB, spearheads efforts in resource mobilisation from local donors and encourages civil society and community-based organisations to foster livelihood opportunities for TB-affected communities.



"Public speaking felt like a nightmare," she recalls. "My knees would buckle; my heart pounded like a drum; and words would turn into dust. But REACH never stopped believing in me. They were my cheerleaders, my safety net, my secret weapon stash."



S Pushpavalli

Community Volunteer: Catalysing Early Detection & Quality Care

For the last six years, Pushpavalli has been a relentless force in combating TB. It all started with Project Axshya, where she, as a community volunteer, encouraged marginalised communities to prioritise early diagnosis and access quality care for TB. P Rajeswaran, then State Lead for Axshya, expresses admiration, noting that her proactive referrals resulted in the early detection of TB for 4-5 people every quarter.

“A woman I helped with her TB diagnosis returned in 2019, facing neglect and a potential marital crisis. Through the counselling skills acquired from REACH, I worked with the couple to address stigma and communication issues, ultimately preserving her marriage,” says Pushpavalli.

Today, fueled by the same passion, she stands tall as a TB Champion, administering the Community Accountability Framework (CAF)

tool to improve the quality of care and services for individuals with TB. Her unwavering voice has mobilised numerous members from Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), channelling vital nutrition resources to those battling TB. Additionally, she leads the Tiruchirappalli district chapter of the TB Survivor-led Network in Tamil Nadu.

“From struggling to afford my son’s education to celebrating his success as a physiotherapist, it’s been a rewarding six years working with REACH,” she adds. “The financial security has also allowed me the freedom to choose a wonderful groom and family for my daughter.”



Sudeshwar Singh

Network Leader: Building Communities That Care

Sudeshwar was diagnosed with drug-sensitive TB in 2010 in a private healthcare facility in Patna, Bihar. At that point, he knew little about TB and asked no questions of the doctor.

"I should have taken the medicine for 6 months and not 9 months," he reflects, acknowledging the gap in his own awareness that prompted him to take the category II retreatment regimen. This realisation fuelled his determination to bridge the information divide within his community, where fear and stigma kept people from speaking out about TB.

The turning point in Sudeshwar's life came when he joined REACH's TB Survivor to TB Champion training programme in 2017. "REACH gave me an identity," he says, underscoring the transformative role the organisation played in shaping not only his personal trajectory but also that of the community. Over the next several years, he participated in trainings on leadership, gender, and communications and advocacy which equipped him to educate and advocate on behalf of TB survivors and those living with TB.

Sudeshwar's journey as a network leader began in 2018 with 13 TB Champions, as a founding member of TB Mukta Vahini (TMV), Bihar's survivor-led network. By the end of 2023, TMV had grown to a robust network of 793 TB Champions across 35 districts in Bihar. This gave Bihar's survivors a platform and a collective voice to advocate for their rights and challenge stigma, besides providing support to individuals with TB. "REACH empowered the community, and in doing so, it empowered me," Sudeshwar asserts, emphasising the dual development of both individuals and the community.

In 2018, he became a member of the Global Fund's Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) committee in India. "That was a game-changer for me," he recalls, acknowledging REACH's instrumental role in equipping him with the skills to voice TB community concerns. "Our advocacy efforts led to the approval of the COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM) grant for Community Engagement, enabling community skill-building during the pandemic."

As Sudeshwar looks ahead, he emphasises the necessity of REACH's continued technical support to networks like TMV, pointing out that "no other organisation works at this level with the community."



Today, Sudeshwar is proud that he is recognised as a TB advocate at national forums and world conferences. "For TMV, REACH will always be a mentor and guide," he acknowledges, underscoring the organisation's indispensable role in his and the network's journey.

V Venkatesan

Person with TB: Sowing Seeds of Resilience and Revival

Venkatesan's life wasn't always rich with the sweet scent of ripening fruits. Before the vibrant oranges and juicy apples that now fill his small shop, there were photocopied pages and the hum of a Xerox machine. But as fate would have it, he had to shut his only source of livelihood. Things got worse when he was diagnosed with TB. The financial strain compounded by disability and health issues left him in a precarious situation, as he became dependent on the generosity of friends for sustenance. It was during his TB treatment at the Sundaram Medical Foundation (SMF) in Chennai in 2022 that he met with TB Nanban Muthulakshmi.

Beyond medical care, Venkatesan found a rock of emotional support at the Nakshatra Centre.

"Instead of just handing out advice, the TB Nanban always took the time to listen to my fears and frustrations," he recalls. "In those dark days, only her words would ring in my ears, urging me to pick up the pieces and try again. She never let me give up on the idea of starting another business. She would remind me of my strengths, my resourcefulness, and the fact that I wasn't alone in this."

With Muthulakshmi's guidance, Venkatesan applied to the state government's scheme for persons with disability and was able to secure a shop in June 2022. This opportunity marked a significant shift in his fortunes. With Muthulakshmi's encouragement, he embraced the chance to rebuild his life. "Things are so much better now," he says. "I was able to complete my treatment and start afresh."

The bond forged with his caregivers is one of trust, love, and mutual concern. "I trust that she is always there for me and my well-being and reach out to her if ever in a dilemma," Venkatesan says, highlighting the enduring connection he maintains with those who played a crucial role in his transformative journey.

Life now revolves around his fruit shop, catering to customers and tending to his wife who faces challenges with her mental health. Despite the limitations imposed by his disability, Venkatesan finds blessings in his everyday life. "I feel blessed," he simply says.





Vikash Rao

TB Champion: Paving Pathways of Progress

In the arid expanses of Ratu, Jharkhand, where dreams often get choked by poverty, Vikash Rao's future seemed scripted – helping his father in the fields and getting married young. Life dealt him a bitter pill in 2019 with the diagnosis of TB, but little did he know that this setback would pave the way for a remarkable journey of personal growth.

Following six months of treatment that led to his recovery, Vikash approached the REACH team in Ranchi seeking an opportunity. He was raw, unsure, his pockets lighter than his heart. “At that point, I was ready to take on any job,” he declares. “Today, the community knows my name. While the recognition fills me with pride, it also reminds me of the responsibility that comes with the TB Champion badge.”

His days now begin with a list of people with TB tucked in his pocket and a motorcycle purring beneath him. He visits them and asks questions about the quality of TB care and services being offered to them. “Ni-kshay ID cards, TPT medicines, nutrition support,” he goes on. “If there's a void in their support system, I am there to bridge the gap.”

“My old Nokia was as smart as an old brick,” Vikash chuckles. “But battling TB meant going digital, so I swapped it for a smartphone. Thankfully, the REACH team also became my tech gurus. Survey forms, data entry, taking good photos – they taught me everything. Now, this phone has become my lifeline, connecting me to those fighting TB.”

Vikash's journey with REACH has been a symphony of self-discovery. His voice, once a whisper, now booms with confidence. He proudly speaks of his thriving chicken farm, built with his savings. And like one good thing leading to another, he purchased a motorcycle and even a tractor to support his younger brother.



Surendra Mehta

TB Champion: Healing Hearts, Reshaping Destinies

Surendra Mehta, a 35-year-old resident of Bara in Rajasthan, incurred expenses exceeding Rs 1.7 lakh at a private facility before receiving a diagnosis of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) at the Kota Medical College in 2016. Following two years of rigorous adherence to treatment, involving 180 injections, he successfully overcame this challenging form of TB.

“My family had exhausted every last rupee for my treatment. My engagement was broken and my family did not know if I would live or die. But against all odds, I survived. So, I have dedicated my life to assisting others facing similar challenges,” Surendra reflects. “Service, to me, is the ultimate religion.”

Surendra works in the Support Hub established by REACH in Bara, as a TB Champion, where he provides counselling, treatment literacy, nutritional and social linkages and psychosocial support to people with TB to improve treatment adherence and outcomes. His commitment transcends his designated role: he goes out of his way to link people with livelihood security schemes like MGNREGA and willingly contributes from his own pocket when necessary.

Reshma, a 32-year-old woman battling TB, struggles to make ends meet as an agricultural labourer. Having lost both parents at a young age and abandoned by her husband, she shoulders the responsibility of caring for her two young children. After being informed about her symptoms by an ASHA worker, Surendra promptly took her for a test, personally shouldering the costs of additional tests and travel. He next became her Ni-kshay Mitra, providing a monthly nutritional package – wheat flour, moong dal, soybean, chickpeas, etc – worth Rs 550.

“Surendra bhaiya is why my children and I are still alive,” Reshma asserts. “Timely diagnosis and medication were critical. He consistently visited to monitor our progress and ensured we had the food we needed.”



Surendra is humbled by the gratitude and blessings he receives from those he has helped and offers an embarrassing smile to their affectionate call of 'neta ji'. Reflecting on the journey, he notes, "People commend me for the impactful work I do and look up to me as an example worth following. I often wonder whether I would have received all this love if I had remained just a TB survivor and hadn't become a TB Champion."



Vimal Fernandes

TB survivor, living with Diabetes: Rebuilding Lives

The Chennai night sky knew Vimal well. He would often find himself under the blurred halo of a streetlight, resting his tired eyes with a cup of chai and a cigarette. "Working nights alters your food patterns and lifestyle. It's like living in a parallel universe," he chuckles. But the nights started bleeding into days, and the years of nocturnal grind, fuelled by ambition and instant noodles, would set the stage for a series of health challenges.

"The first cracks appeared in 2017 when my vision started blurring the world at my feet," Vimal recalls. "Over the next two years, I experienced a disconcerting progression. In 2018, I was diagnosed with Diabetes and had to undergo surgery to address the looming threat to my vision."

Then, 2022 delivered a sucker punch: a lump on his neck morphed into the dreaded TB.

"It scared me out of my wits," he admits. The disease, often shrouded in stigma and fear, felt to him like a roaring tiger ready to pounce. "However, the TB Nanban at the Nakshatra Centre at VHS, not only counselled me but went above and beyond, making personal visits to my home every month to ensure that I was taking the medicines."

Hailing from a family of sportspersons with a legacy of representing India at the state and international levels, Vimal has always valued physical fitness. All the personal setbacks saw him gain weight, but a determined effort led to a remarkable 40 kg weight loss in 2015. The birth of his son in 2016 further motivated him to adopt a healthier lifestyle, culminating in his dedication to cycling and swimming.

Medication-induced blood sugar spikes tested him, but the TB Nanban stood by him, providing motivation and support during his treatment. "Sowmiya has been nothing short of a family member to me. When confronted with news of an illness such as TB, it inevitably burdens your mental well-being, and you can't recover with physical fitness alone," Vimal emphasises, underscoring the crucial role of mental health in the healing journey.

Vimal's journey is not only about overcoming health challenges but also about breaking the cycle of diabetes that affected his family. His father's struggle with diabetes left a lasting impact, prompting Vimal to take his own health seriously. "I lost my dad quite early in my life, and my mother and I had to go through a lot. I want to live a healthy lifestyle so that I am there for my children," he affirms.





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