

PRESS RELEASE

Impact Report Released: Accelerating access to person-centred care for people with TB

TB Champions of TB Mukht Vahini, Bihar's survivor-led network come together to support people with TB during COVID-19

Patna, 16 November 2021: TB survivors who have won the fight against the disease are best placed to support others with TB and advocate for their rights, and we encourage TB survivors and Champions to come forward and support Bihar's TB elimination efforts, said Shri Sanjay Kumar Singh IAS, Special Secretary, Health and ED-NHM, Govt of Bihar. He was speaking at a dissemination meeting held in Patna and organised by REACH, in association with the State TB Cell, Bihar and TB Mukht Vahini (TMV), Bihar's survivor-led network, with support from the Stop TB Partnership.

Speaking about the power of community engagement in TB elimination efforts, Dr. B. K. Mishra, State Programme Officer-TB, NTEP, Bihar said, "Despite the various challenges posed by COVID-19, TB Champions came forward to support people with TB on treatment by providing them telecounseling services." He encouraged members of TMV to fearlessly pursue their efforts towards TB elimination goals and advocate for improved services for the TB-affected community.

Joining the meeting from Chennai, Dr Ramya Ananthkrishnan, Director, REACH, congratulated the TB Champions of Bihar on their achievements and spoke about an upcoming initiative on addressing drug-resistant TB. "TB Champions can ensure pre-treatment counselling for people with DR-TB. This initiative aims to reduce pre-treatment loss to follow-up among people with DR-TB through a peer-led, personalised and guided support model in eight districts of Bihar," she said.

Speaking about the telecounseling efforts of TB Champions of during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sudeshwar Singh, Secretary, TMV, said, "We started providing telecounseling services to people with TB on treatment. After training, the TB Champions began reaching out to the TB-affected community. They spoke to people with TB regarding any specific issues they have been facing and they coordinated with the NTEP team to resolve those issues."

Through a short video message, Dr. Suvanand Sahu, Deputy Executive Director, Stop TB Partnership, urged TB Champions to transform challenges posed by COVID-19 into opportunities for learning and improving local health programmes. "Each and every TB Champion is a leader in their own communities and this community action can help address stigma and gender-related barriers to TB care. We must act now to ensure that people with TB who are unable to access TB services are linked to programmes," he said.

Shashi Ranjan, a TB Champion from Nalanda district, described the various support services he along with over 40 other TB Champions provided to people with TB. "We tried to find out whether people currently on treatment have sufficient medicines and ensured that they went for their follow-up tests. We reiterated the importance of completing the treatment and provided psychosocial support. We also brought people who had dropped out back on treatment. We closely coordinated with the NTEP staff in the district and were able to solve any problems that came up," he explained.

The meeting was held to mark the culmination of a year-long project implemented by REACH, with support from the Stop TB Partnership through the Challenge Facility for Civil Society mechanism. An impact report was released on the occasion and summarises the key results and achievements of the project including the following – over 290 TB survivors from 14 districts of the state sensitised on TB and key issues; over 9500 people with TB received support through telecounseling services provided by TB Champions; over 2800 people in the community received information on TB by Champions; and

more than 8500 people with TB were counselled on COVID-appropriate behaviour and encouraged to get vaccinated. The report also highlights various initiatives towards the strengthening and growth of TB Mukh Vahini.

The occasion also saw the members of TB Mukh Vahini's 10 District Chapters launching and signing a Charter of commitment, where they reiterated the support the network will provide to TB-affected communities.

About TB Mukh Vahini

A first-of-its-kind network, of and by TB survivors, TMV was born in 2017 as an outcome of the first training of TB survivors in Bihar, organised by REACH with support from USAID. Thirteen TB Champions from seven districts announced the network and their intention to work towards a person-centred ecosystem. Since inception, TMV has supported PwTB, sensitised communities and advocated with various stakeholders.

About REACH

An acronym for Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health, REACH is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the fight against TB for over two decades. REACH has been working in Bihar since 2016, to support and strengthen the community response to TB, with support from USAID and the Stop TB Partnership.

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