**Georgia Country Coordinating Mechanism**

**Oversight Committee Field Visit to Zugdidi and Batumi**

**January 22-24, 2020**

**The purpose of the visits**; to discuss the current status of the implementation of HIV and TB programmes and on-going initiatives.

**Objective of the visits**: to discuss program indicators; to review the challenges in the process of grant implementation and discuss ways of their overcoming.

**Methodology:**

* Discussion with the project implementation staff;
* Conducting interviews with beneficiaries of programmes.

**January 22, 2020, Zugdidi**

**Association of Young Psychologists and Doctors - XENON**

**Participants:**

Nino Mamulashvili – WHO, Program Coordinator, OC member

Eliso Bichashvili – Ministry of Justice, Medical Department of Special Penitentiary Service, OC member

Lasha Tvaliashvili – Real People - Real Vision, HIV community, OC member

Nikoloz Mitzashvili - Patients Union, Former TB patient, OC member

Nino Janashia – Xenon, Chair of the Board

Tamar Petridisi – Xenon, Social Worker

Medea Chilachava – Xenon, VCT Consultant

Tsira Tordia - Xenon, Social Worker

Program Beneficiaries

Irina Grdzelidze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

Irina Grdzleidze provided meeting participants with detailed information on the purpose and objectives of the field visit, the mandate, functions and responsibilities of the CCM Oversight Comittee.

Head of the Organization, Nino Janashia introduced the staff, overviewed in details their functions, comprehensively described the preventive, diagnosis and rehabilitation services provided by the organization. The main targeted beneficiaries are IDUs and their partners. However during field the general population is also covered. VCT, syringe exchange program are on-going, other supply material is provided to the beneficiaries, Hepatits B, Hepatits C, HIV, TB, syphilis screening is performed. The organization is involved in Hep C State Program. The harmonization with Global Fund Program is ensured.

The service delivery is performed both at the office and through mobile ambulatory. During 2019, 2004 beneficiaries (including 171 partners) were covered with HIV testing, 1542 went through Hep C screening. GeneXpert turned out to be very effective and allowed enrollment of the patient into the treatment during 24 hours after testing. The confirmatory test is done on the site. FIND finances salary for 6 laboratory workers (the funds will be provided until the end of March). 50 confirmatory tests have been done in January 2020. The staff noted that sometimes they will have to undertake quite intensive work aimed at persuading patients to start Hep C treatment.

During 2019, the organization delivered at least one service to 3534 beneficiaries; basic packages were provided to 2693 people; 171 partners were served during 2019.

2164 beneficiaries underwent TB screening in 2019, out of this 17 were referred to TB Center for confirmation; none of them had confirmed TB.

The staff performs effective work aimed at prevention of treatment termination.

Effective and timely communication with PR and GHRN is in place. It was noted that in general there is no interruption in temrs of provision with suply material, though at this stage, the stock of syphilis tests is depleted and they do not have information material.

The reduced financing was named as a challenge. This complicated reaching of programmatic indicators. The case management component was also negatively affected. The staff of case manager was abolished and financing was reduced from 300 to 100 GEL.

The necessity to ensure financial sustainability of services was noted. Reduction in financing results in loss of qualified personnel and makes difficult to sustain high quality of the services. The reduced gift packages makes complicated enrollment of the partners.

The FIND ends in March, 2020. The staff expressed willingness for increases funding, which will enable expansion of work in terms of general population and will enable adding of specific services, such as Hep B screening/testing.

The members of OC interviewed beneficiaries in the format of separate meeting. They expressed their satisfaction with regard to the services, and noted improved quality of life. Both beneficiaries were enrolled in Hep C elimination program. They expressed their gratitude for such unique opportunity. They try to get the beneficiaries enrolled and support them in terms of starting and competition of the treatment.

**January 23**

**Adjara Public Health Center**

**Participants:**

Nino Mamulashvili – WHO, Program Coordinator, OC member

Eliso Bichashvili – Ministry of Justice, Medical Department of Special Penitentiary Service, OC member

Lasha Tvaliashvili – Real People - Real Vision, HIV community, OC member

Nikoloz Mitzashvili - Patients Union, Former TB patient, OC member

Rusudan Shavishvili – Adjara Public Health Center, Director

Nona Epadze - Adjara Public Health Center, Deputy Director

Irina Grdzelidze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

Irina Grdzleidze provided meeting participants with detailed information on the purpose and objectives of the field visit, the mandate, functions and responsibilities of the CCM Oversight Committee.

Rusudan Shavishvili noted on the importance of TB, HIV, Hep C screening and timely detection. She underlined Global Fund’s great input in introduction of integrated screening.

Around 340 PHC were re-trained in terms of integrated screening. Besides, at local level public/private partners are mobilized; the horizontal integration of these diseases is supported.

Tests and consumables, quality control of unified e-database, technical support, collection of the samples from the beneficiaries with a positive screening results and confirmation are financed from the central budget within state programs on Hep C and HIV/AIDS.

Rusudan Shavishvili underlined importance of continuous support for the staff of PHC, of the involvement of local self-government and public health, which serves as a basis for the success of the project.

The local self-government bodies considerably contribute to the project implementation; local municipalities provide financial support of Medical Centers involved in program -1,75 Gel per each screened patient.

The details of Zero TB initiative were presented and discussed during the meeting. In 6 municipalities, 19 selected case managers (epidemiologists), perform outreach together with the laboratory worker and phthisiologist through mobile ambulatory. Approximately 30 people are covered during one outreach session. Currently the scope of work of the case manager has been expanded and they perform a role of the mediator between the patient and healthcare service, in a way, in terms of patients follow up and defining barriers for adherence. The regional public health service coordinates activities of all municipalities. The importance of ECHO was underlined. VOT is in place.

The planned initiative envisaging utilization of the vehicle equipped with digital X-Ray and Artificial Intelligence was highly ranked by the representatives of Adjara Public Health Center; the GeneXpert can be installed into the vehicle (mobile laboratory). The innovation will greatly contribute to early diagnosis, increased effectiveness of the program, including follow up of the patients.

The importance of the patients follow up for their timely enrollment and completion of the treatment was discussed. The necessity to strengthen adherence component and the importance of the involvement of Patients Union were underlined. Individual approach used by the support groups caused increased effectiveness of the program. The representatives of the Public Health Center mentioned accumulated experience of effective cooperation with Patients Unions and expressed their willingness to continue and deepen cooperation. The adherence project is very important for improved adherence of TB patients. The results of the adherence project should be evaluated, the project should be fine-tuned and continued. Retaining of the experienced staff and utilization of these human resources is also very important.

The issue if stigma and discrimination was discussed. The active role of the media in the region contributing to raising public awareness was underlined. The Hep C program was especially actively covered by mass media which contributed to reduction of stigma. The representatives of the Center expressed their willingness for conducting such campaigns in relation to TB. The role of the former patients and producing of video comemrcials with their participation will be very much appreciated.

During the meeting it was noted that the data reporting is done both paper-based and through e-platform. The importance of data aggregation with purpose to avoid overlap between two programs (integrated screening, Zero TB) in the region was underlined. It was also noted that TB questionnaire used during integrated screening is kind of outdated and it is desirable to renew it.

Effective communication and coordination between all stakeholders, complete synergy of the components of the programs are ensured.

The Secretariat and the members of the OC participating at the outreach to see the work of mobile ambulatory. Despite bad weather, the number of the beneficiaries, taking the advantage to get tested on two dieseases, get screened through the quastiannaire on the thirrd (TB) and to receive doctor’s consultation was quite big. The results are provided rapidly and in case of suspicion, the timely referral to corresponding clinic is performed.

The Secretariat and members of OC together with the representative of Publc Health Center visited LTD Regional Family Medicine Center. Head of the clinic, Lali Davitadze described in details the services provided by the clinic. Integrated screening is performed at the clinic and during the visit of the family doctor. The trust of the patients to the Clinic is high. The data are reflected in the e-platform. It was noted, that the detection rate of the screening is higher during the referral of the patients to the clinic in comparison to the screening performed during outreach at the district. The refusal to get screened is almost equal to zero. Considering the stigma, it turned out to be more feasible to take specimen of blood at the doctor’s office during patients visit to the center. The Center is not involved in Hep C program. The Director of the Center expressed desire for increased funding.

**Patients Union – Zugdidi and Batumi. January 22-23**

**Participants:**

Nino Mamulashvili – WHO, Program Coordinator, OC member

Eliso Bichashvili – Ministry of Justice, Medical Department of Special Penitentiary Service, OC member

Lasha Tvaliashvili – Real People - Real Vision, HIV community, OC member

Nikoloz Mitzashvili - Patients Union, Former TB patient, OC member

Tinatin Kharebava – Patients Union, Zugdidi

David Alkhazashvili - Patients Union, Batumi

Tengiz Chogadze - Patients Union, Batumi

Irina Grdzelidze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

The members of OC together with Secretariat met with the representative of Patients Union in Zugdidi on January 22 and in Batumi on January 23.

The representatives of the Patients Unions discussed adherence project – pilot and following one-year project. The representative of the Union in Zugdidi noted that they work both with sensitive and drug resistant TB patients. The group comprising of 5 people worked with the patients. The peer-educators had a significant role. 35 patients were covered during the duration of the project. All of them completed treatment. They have actively communicated with other non-governmental organizations and clinics. Based on the needs of the patients they were referred/accompanied to the clinics or the organizations. The positive cooperation with TB Center adherence consultant and timely referral have not been established, though the representative of the Patients Union noted that they had constant communication with TB Center with the purpose of reporting on the accomplished activities.

Patients Union expressed their regret with regard to end of the project, as they believe that continuation of the project has a vital importance for the region. It was mentioned that the treatment interruption rate by the period of launching the project was high – 15%, which to their opinion was conditioned by lack in awareness, stigma etc; the rate of interrupted treatment constituted 3% by the end of the project. It was underlined that one of the objectives of the project envisaged strengthening of community organizations. The qualifiqation of the personnel involved in the project was highlited. Despite completion of the project, the representatives of the Patient Union still continue communication with the patient and their support, mainly through consultations.

The representatives of Batumi Patients Union, being the former TB patients themselves, comprehemsively overviewed the performed activities. They noted that they have effective communication with the management of TB Center, which positively affects the implementation of the project. The Center adherence consultant timely gets the Patients Union involved and the cases are jointly managed.

They highlighted importance of the support experienced from the side of Mr Dimitri Tsetskhladze, Head of TB Center, which contributed to reaching good outcomes and coordinataion of activities.

Approximately 50 patients were reached by the adherence project in Adjara region. Out of this, only 3 cases of treatment interruption (due to migration) were observed. Though one patient who had continued treatment as a result of active online communication with the Union, returned to Georgia already cured.

The representatives of the organization expressed strong desire and readiness for the continuation of the project. The spoke on the deficiencies that should be taken into consideration in the new project. Namely, members of support group should not be hired by different organizations; they should be from one organization which will a supportive factor for the goup on terms of performing effective work. The representatives from both regions noted that 1 year period is not sufficient for achieving feasible results.

The representatives of Patients Union mentioned effective and productive communication with Adjara Public Health Center and expressed desire and readiness to participate in media campaigh in their capacity of former patients, who got cured due to available services and support groups.

The representatives of the organization expressed their deep concern with regard to planned close of one DOT Center (Benze settlemt). After that, there will be only one DOT center left in Batumi, which will create a very big barrier for the patient for continuation of the treatment in terms of geographic accessibility of services. The representatives of the organization asked memebrs of the OC to provide assistance for the region and raise this issue before CCM.