

Georgia CCM

Oversight Committee

Site visit to National Center of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases

January 16, 2018

Sites of the visit:

National Center of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases

Goal of the visit:

To study closely the GF supported TB project and to identify the implementation challenges.

Objectives of the visit:

1. To study closely the GFATM supported project: Provision of Support for Patients with Resistant Tuberculosis to Provide Improvement in Treatment;
2. To collect information on harmonization of the approaches to support TB treatment adherence;
3. To identify possible challenges of program implementation and set up the ways of their addressing.

Methodology:

- ✓ To interview NCTLD staff;
- ✓ To interview the members of the community organization and peer educations involved in the pilot project implementation;

Participants:

Zaza Avaliani – National Center of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases, Director;

Mikheil Madzgarashvili - National Center of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases;

Malkhaz Davitashvili - National Center of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases;

Konstantine Labartkava – New Vector, Director;

Lasha Abesadze – New Vector, Kvemo Kartli;

Tamar Kakulia – New Vector, social worker, consultant;

Nikoloz Mirzashvili – Patients Union

Maka Danelia – NCDCPH, M&E Officer;

Tamar Bortsvadze – CCM, Chair of OC

Irina Grdzeldze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

General Comment: Starting from 2017 community organization “New Vector” and Patients Union in collaboration with NCTLD started implementation of the project “Provision of Support for Patients with Resistant Tuberculosis to Provide Improvement in Treatment“. The project aimed at improvement of M/XDR TB patients’ adherence by means of involvement of community organizations. The ultimate goal of the project is to build a well-designed system of collaboration among the structures implementing TB control activities and community organizations to further enhance patient-oriented approach and support completion of the treatment.

The project is implemented in Tbilisi, Rustavi, Batumi, Kutaisi and Zugdidi.

Observation: It is notable that the involvement of Civil Society in TB control activities has not been too close. Functional mechanisms for ensuring close collaboration between the units implementing National TB Program and community organizations did not exist during the years. The latter represents important prerequisite for introducing and strengthening of patient-oriented approaches. The mentioned pilot project builds the basis for such approaches and is oriented at meeting the needs of most at risk populations. The support of patients is implemented by multi-disciplinary groups. The group unites psychologists, social workers and peers (former TB patients, their family members). The implementation of activities having big importance for eradication of risk-factors and completion of the treatment such as relevant information and awareness raising campaigns, support of treatment schemes, working with risk-groups on site are implemented based on this multi-disciplinary approach. The special attention is given to M/XDR TB cases and the people representing vulnerable and most at risk groups. From the beginning (July 2017) up to date 178 patients have been enrolled in the program, out of this 5 have already completed the treatment.

The participants were given an opportunity to see the part of the Center being renovated with the support of MSF. The building will be designated for the multi-disciplinary meetings. It was noted that the premises will create a favorable environment for working with the patients and for enhancing collaboration between TB center and community organizations. It is anticipated that the premises will become operations by the end of January.

Existing challenges:

The following challenges in terms of improved treatment outcomes and adherence to treatment schemes were highlighted during the meeting:

- Difficult social status of the patients. Financial difficulties faced by the part of the patients represent one of the important factors impeding adequate continuation of the treatment. The advocacy efforts on municipality level are being implemented for enabling the patients to get the social benefits designated for socially vulnerable populations on the

local level. As explained by the representatives of community organizations the improved system would enable the patients to solve the acute social problems and undergo the treatment without obstacles. Unfortunately, there is no readiness to provide assistance from local self-governing authorities so far.

- The most vulnerable patients having credit in banks have problems related with freezing cash incentives by the banks for outstanding debts. Frequently the social workers have to negotiate with bank employees for thawing out the asset freeze which makes the treatment process more complicated;
- In the regions with national minorities there is a need to communicate and disseminate information material in Azerbaijani or Russian language;
- According to the representatives of TB Center, there are no adherence guidelines in place. Existence of the latter would allow them to put into unite system the adherence efforts undertaken by the community organizations for coordinated implementation according to the agreed procedure. The work on this direction is on-going.

Recommendations:

- The program is representing an important intervention in terms of introducing patient-oriented, multi-disciplinary approach and it's desirable its extension and expansion after completion of the pilot phase. Moreover, the project gives a good opportunity for harmonization with other GF supported projects (e.g in terms of harm reduction), which represents a good tool for optimization of the prevention and treatment services targeting most at risk populations;
- In order to enroll more beneficiaries and to provide adequate support it is necessary to provide patients with practical information and to further deepen the cooperation between the TB Center and community organizations which will further increase the quality of interventions and will improve treatment outcomes;
- It is necessary to strengthen advocacy efforts on the self-governance levels for ensuring social support to get the most vulnerable patients being under the treatment enrolled into the local system of social support;
- In the regions with national minorities it is important to develop and disseminate the communication material in the language understandable for local residents (Georgian-Armenian, Georgian – Azerbaijani);