

Lalitha Gopal: Supporting TB Patient in Bangalore Slum, India



Lalitha Gopal runs a small shop in the Bagalur slum of Bangalore, India. Bagalur is a home for thousands of migrant construction workers who live in tiny, low-roofed dwellings with little ventilation. Lalitha's family migrated to Bangalore when she was a young girl. This slum has been identified by India's Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP) as having one of the highest concentrations of tuberculosis (TB) cases in Bangalore.

In November 2009, when the Population Services International (PSI/India) was searching for volunteers to assist in treatment of TB patients by providing DOTS (directly observed treatment, short-course), Lalitha wholeheartedly came forward. She was trained by the PSI and the RNTCP to administer DOTS in her community, and since then she has been an active treatment adherent supporter.

Lalitha has been living in Bagalur for many years and she knows well problems of migrant workers who often have limited access to treatment. "When forced to make a choice between taking rest and a starving family, many patients choose the latter, throwing themselves to peril by opting to work," said Lalitha. Thus, involvement of such people as Lalitha and her volunteer peers is vitally important for RNTCP, as they provide TB patients with DOTS close to their homes.

Today, Lalitha remains a treatment adherence champion, administering TB DOTS to patients and motivating those in her community with TB symptoms to get tested. She was recognized as the best DOTS provider in Greater Bangalore Municipal Corporation in 2011. Lalitha and her fellow volunteers play a crucial role in India's response to TB as the government seeks to treat those who are hard to reach.

PSI's TB programs seek to strengthen the role of the private sector in reducing TB incidence and ensuring successful TB treatment completion. PSI in India implemented the CONNECT project, a five year program (2006 – 2011) engaging private sector to prevent/mitigate AIDS and Tuberculosis, funded by the United States Agency for International Development. The Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Government of India and the International Labour Organization were PSI's technical partners for CONNECT.

Image courtesy: Vijay Kutty

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