



Biannual review meeting participants. Photo credit: Yonas Tesfaye

USAID ELIMINATE TB PROJECT

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

JULY 2021

The five-year USAID Eliminate TB Project builds on MSH's contributions to Ethiopia's TB control efforts for the past 15 years. Collaborating with longtime partner KNCV Tuberculosis Foundation and three local partners, Amhara Development Association (ADA), Oromia Development Association (ODA), and REACH Ethiopia, MSH will work to reduce TB incidence and mortality by engaging public- and private-sector players to improve the quality and sustainability of TB services in Ethiopia.

USAID Eliminate TB Project Biannual Review: A Promising Start

The five-year USAID Eliminate TB Project has completed individual regional review meetings in the five implementation regions of Amhara, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP), Tigray, Sidama, and Oromia. With plans to hold project review meetings biannually, the project invited all regional office representatives and partner organizations to its first project review meeting in Addis Ababa in May 2021.

During the two-day meeting, each regional office presented achievements and implementation challenges. A common achievement across all regional offices was the completion of a mass TB screening campaign to commemorate World TB Day in March. Among the challenges identified were improper TB screening by inexperienced health workers and a significant number of drug-resistant TB patients who missed treatment. Solutions to these gaps, including increasing access to drug-susceptibility testing and increasing support to treatment initiating centers, were discussed.



Left: Biannual review meeting participants. Photo credit: Joney Ayele

Right: USAID Eliminate TB Project Chief of Party Dr. Daniel Gemechu delivers closing remarks at the biannual review meeting. Photo credit: Joney Ayele

Dr. Daniel Gemechu, Chief of Party of the USAID Eliminate TB Project, closed the meeting by remarking on the amazing work and promising activities underway to meet the overall project goal. He pointed out the need for an intense focus on laboratories, “as they are the backbone of TB diagnosis and we need to work on increasing the quality of services.” Engaging

the government and the private health sector was a common theme throughout the meeting as a key factor toward TB elimination. Dr. Gemechu left participants with the rallying cry that “We must not hesitate in approaching government officials regularly. We must advocate for TB patients!”

Collaborating with the Ministry of Education to Increase TB Awareness in Schools

To increase community knowledge of TB, USAID and the Government of Ethiopia have used various methods, including TV spots, radio ads, fliers, and brochures. In addition, schools are a target location to disseminate information about TB because they can be a high-risk setting for TB spread.

In collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health, the USAID Eliminate TB Project organized a two-day school TB program sensitization training in May 2021. Conducted in the Oromia region, 40 members from the Ministry of Education and Regional Education Bureau, including communication experts and HIV focal persons, participated. The program’s ultimate goal is to expand TB awareness to communities through schools by targeting students, aged 12 to 17, and utilizing existing student clubs and student-led mini media where students provide short news updates during break time.

During the training, participants emphasised the importance of working with schools to reduce TB infection both within schools

and at the community level. Concepts such as global and national TB prevalence, TB prevention and treatment, and multidrug- and drug-resistant TB were discussed extensively. Lessons learned from previous successful school TB programs were presented by the Oromia Regional Government Health Bureau.



School TB program training. Photo credit: Joney Ayele

Exchanging Knowledge: Learning from the Pilot School TB Program

During the two-day school TB sensitization program training conducted by the Ministry of Health and the USAID Eliminate TB Project in May, Bizuneh Alemu, a TB advisor at the Oromia Regional Government Health Bureau, presented on the region's pilot school TB program that he led in March 2020. In the 11 selected zones within the Oromia district, the pilot program identified 127 TB cases, including 98 students, 5 teachers, and 24 community members identified by students.

Bizuneh believes school TB programs should be a priority intervention because a high proportion of TB cases are found in schools and universities, classrooms are overcrowded, and students are effective community mobilizers. Many students and parents have very little to no knowledge of TB transmission and prevention methods.

Some best practices shared by Bizuneh from his pilot included the need to establish a close relationship between district

educational bureaus and school principals to ensure a successful program. He added that if a digital screening machine had been available to the pilot program, more TB cases could have been detected quickly, which is a consideration for future programs. After the success of the pilot school TB program in the 11 selected zones, Bizuneh feels “confident enough to expand the success of school TB programs to other part of the region. We would like to share and apply our experience in the rest of the country as well.”



Bizuneh Alemu, TB advisor, Oromia Regional Government Health Bureau. Photo credit: Joney Ayele



Etsegenet Getachew, TB and leprosy expert at the Ministry of Health's National TB Prevention Program. Photo credit: Joney Ayele

SPOTLIGHTING MINISTRY OF HEALTH ENGAGEMENT

Etsegenet Getachew, a TB and leprosy expert at the Ministry of Health's National TB Prevention Program, provided opening remarks at the training, stating that schools are the best institutes for providing designed learning experiences with the objective of benefiting individuals and society at large. This favorable environment is the best place to implement the TB awareness raising program, as students can be good change agents, taking what they learned and heard to their parents and neighborhood communities.

Etsegenet included a call to action for all training participants to establish strong relationships with schools and communities and involve school principals to use students' HIV clubs, gender clubs, and other groups to offer TB prevention and treatment education in a consistent manner.

Mass TB Campaign Tests Over 20,000 in Vulnerable Populations

World TB Day was observed in March by the USAID Eliminate TB Project and the Amhara Regional Health Bureau, who partnered to conduct a TB screening campaign among vulnerable populations in the Amhara region. During this mass screening campaign, 20,774 people from key vulnerable populations were tested. Of those screened, 493 were identified as having presumptive TB.

The USAID Eliminate TB Project worked with the regional health bureau to design the campaign and provided financial and technical support by orientating health workers on

conducting TB testing. Staff provided the initial training and supervised the screening teams throughout the campaign. Screenings were conducted in different key populations, including those who reside in slum areas, prisoners, those who travel to holy water sites, university students, and the elderly.

One person identified with presumptive TB said to the screening team "had you not been here for the screening, I would have died because of TB". He mentioned he had previously visited four or five health facilities but none had tested him for TB.



People congregating at a holy water site. Photo credit: MSH staff



Screening residents for TB in slum areas in the Amhara region. Photo credit: MSH staff

Training of Trainers in Basic TB Clinical and Management Skills

In collaboration with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, the USAID Eliminate TB Project organized a six-day training that began on June 19, 2021 in the Oromia region. The training was attended by 435 health professionals in the city of Adama.

It focused on training in-service providers to train other health care providers on basic clinical and programmatic management of TB, TB/HIV, drug-resistant TB, and leprosy.

Conducting Review Meetings across the SNNP Region

In May 2021, the USAID Eliminate TB Project held four review meetings in the SNNP region in collaboration with the SNNP Regional Government Health Bureau. Meetings were held in the towns of Wolyta Sodo, Bonga, Arba Minch, and Butajira.

The objective of these review meetings was to share information on the last nine months of project implementation, achievements and gaps, and best practices to scale up in other implementation areas. The meetings brought together 204 stakeholders from various sectors and backgrounds, including zonal health departments, the HIV sector, prison clinics, and GeneXpert sites.

During this quarter's review meetings, 77 TB focal persons were oriented on external quality assurance (EQA) and EQA randomization, slide randomization and collection, sample transportation, GeneXpert utilization, generating TB performance indicators, and standard of care implementation process. This orientation was supplemented by visiting health

facilities and group discussions. It is important to understand the EQA process because it allows comparison among test sites, provides early warning for systematic problems, and helps customers know which laboratories can provide reliable results.



Review meeting participants. Photo credit MSH staff