

The Richard Gove Foundation/CWEH fund and Ekta Niketan

Ekta Niketan TB centre

Ekta Niketan is a centre to address tuberculosis (TB) – its clinical as well as sociocultural determinants. Unlike other TB centres, the project is right in the middle of marginalised communities, and is managed by a team of adivasi (tribal) villagers with minimum formal education. Ekta Niketan is now an established TB centre recognised by the government. The government provides anti-TB medicines free of cost – the supply of medicines has been interrupted during 2023-24 though.

Ekta Niketan is unique to addressing TB in marginalised adivasi communities; it is a model in the making. The fund from the Richard Gove Foundation/CWEH during 2022-24 has helped Ekta Niketan to demonstrate the importance of addressing health holistically, particularly in protecting people's culture, dignity and rights while intervening clinical conditions. Even though a trained medical doctor is not always present at the centre in-person (a standard requirement for a TB centre), Ekta Niketan has attracted a section of professionals across India (public health, academics, anthropologists and environmentalists and activists) to learn its approach.

The place of cultural identity, dignity and rights is at the centre of Ekta Niketan TB programme. The programme is managed by a team of village health workers, the social, cultural, educational and economic backgrounds of whom are much the same as the patients they treat. By being right in the middle of an adivasi village, and that the care-givers being much the same as the care-seekers, TB patients and their family members feel at home at Ekta Niketan – the very approach of the project. It is a popular TB centre for adivasi and other marginalised communities in the area and has become a platform to discuss social and political determinants of TB.

In order to promote adivasi music and cultural events that are scarce and at stake today, Ekta Niketan has established Jharkhandi Music Culture Centre in its premises. For the same purpose, it gives an additional attention to work with migrant workers who attend the TB centre as patients. The work is at its early stage though.

Next step - from local to national; from social to political determinants of TB

With the approach mentioned above, the project has entered its next phase. Also, it has started attracting a section of professionals and activists across India – an opportunity to promote sociopolitical determinants of TB from the local to the national level. In 2025, Ekta Niketan will focus on the political determinants of TB. The recent discussion on “TB is not a social disease but a political disease” organised by Ekta Niketan says it all. The summary of the discussion is attached.

Summary:

- The fund has allowed Ekta Niketan to develop the Adivasi Music Culture Centre and to undertake certain activities such as meetings/discussions with patients and their family members, public health professionals; music/cultural programmes; video production.
- The number of patients accessing the TB centre is on the rise. In 2024, over 700 new TB patients have been registered for treatment. Health workers at Ekta Niketan are overstretched in managing the TB centre itself, and as a result the planned sociocultural activities have been compromised to an extent.
- Ekta Niketan committee comprising cured TB patients and village leaders has taken its shape but yet to be empowered to address social and political determinants of TB.
- Overall the project is on its track - an approach that is not a time-bound 'project'.

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Of the pledged £10,000, the project has utilised £7,500 during 2022-2024.

1. Jharkhandi Giti Riti Centre (Jharkhand's Music Culture Centre)

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| • Equipment/instrument for the music-culture centre | £600 |
| • Monthly remuneration of 1 person (TB centre coordinator) | £2,700 |
| • Production of audio-visuals | £300 |

2. Meetings and discussions

TB, Women, Migration and Adivasi identity meeting	£300
Adivasi Day	£250
Cultural event	£350
TB - a political disease meeting	£300

3. TB centre

Nutritional supplement to selected TB patients	£700
Purchase of anti-TB medicines (Unanticipated costs)	£1,500
Repair of the Ekta Niketan Centre (Unanticipated costs)	£500

Total **£7,500**

TB - not a social disease but a political disease



A session on "TB is not a Social but a Political Disease" was held at Ekta Niketan, bringing together health workers, community members, and experts. The discussion focused on how tuberculosis (TB) is linked to poverty and shaped by social and political factors. It called for urgent changes in systems and community-led efforts to fight TB effectively.

Key Points Discussed:

TB's Connection to Society and Politics

- TB disproportionately affects poor communities, earning it the name "disease of the poor". The poor face barriers in access to diagnostic and treatment services; are more vulnerable to active TB on account of under nutrition, crowded and unhygienic living conditions, and occupational health hazards; have worse treatment outcomes; and are at greater risk of relapse and reinfection.
- Speakers highlighted the need for political actions and better government accountability to address the problem.
- A historical example showed that TB cases in England dropped after 1950 due to better living conditions, not just medical treatments, stressing the importance of social improvements.

Community-Based Care

- Health workers from Fatepur Village shared how they use the forms developed by Dr. Manan Ganguli to diagnose TB and build personal bonds with TB patients to improve care and ensure they follow treatments.
- The session stressed the importance of turning individual health concerns into a collective movement for better advocacy.

Challenges in Public Healthcare

- Problems include limited treatment options for extra-pulmonary TB, delays in diagnostic tools like CBNAAT cartridges, and distribution of nearly expired nutritional products in the Govt. set up.

- The government now gives ₹500 per month (set to increase to ₹1,000) instead of food rations, but participants questioned whether this is enough.
- There was a call for government health workers to perform their duties more efficiently.
- One of the significant challenges in public healthcare is the irregular supply of medicines for TB, which disrupts timely treatment and recovery.

Innovative Efforts and Gaps

- Nikshay Mitra Initiative: This government program pairs donors with TB patients to provide nutritious food during treatment. Although the question of state responsibility to address food insecurity remains.
- In Jajpur, Odisha, the Tata Steel Foundation provides food items like groundnuts, milk powder, oil, and lentils. However, claims of zero TB cases in the district were doubted.

Economic and Systemic Barriers

Pharmaceutical and nutrition companies profit from TB treatments, making it harder to eliminate the disease, which was called a "disease of the market".

Spreading Awareness and Advocacy

The session stressed the need for effective communication at all levels - from local communities to district administrations - to spread awareness about TB and its solutions.

Future Challenges

Eliminating TB by 2025 remains difficult due to ongoing social, political, and economic issues. The session called for major reforms, stronger community involvement, and more political support to address these challenges.

This discussion was a wake-up call, emphasising that fighting TB requires more than medicine - it demands social and political action alongside community efforts.

For more information, write to:
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Fourth World Action

small actions, lasting impacts

:

Prof. Vinita Damodaran
Richard Grove Foundation
Centre for World Environment History
University of Sussex

9 January 2025

Dear Prof. Damodaran,

Please find attached a brief account of the fund from CWEH that has benefited the project Ekta Niketan in India, a project of Fourth World Action.

May I also request you to provide us the outstanding funds (£2,500) to help continue the project.

Thanking you in advance.

Kind regards



Dr Manan Ganguli

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*an initiative to
reach out
adivasi and other
marginalised
populations in
India
living in
a world
of the
forgotten
and
the neglected*