



# International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease

Health solutions for the poor

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### Project Axshya: how to reach 744 million people with TB control services: working together, across sectors and linkages

PRESS RELEASE

**New Delhi, 22 March 2011** -- With a population of nearly 1.2 billion to serve, public health experts in India are used to thinking in big numbers. The planners of the massive new tuberculosis control project, Project Axshya (meaning 'free of TB'), are no exception. And they have no choice, given that India reels under the highest burden of tuberculosis globally today. Supported by one of the largest grants from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund), the five-year project got underway last year with a focus on engaging civil society to improve the reach and effectiveness of India's Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme in 374 districts across 23 Indian states, reaching some 744 million people by 2015.

The civil society initiative, led by the **International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union)** and World Vision India (WVI), in close collaboration with the Government of India, is now building up significant momentum towards its objectives. The Union will manage Project Axshya in 300 districts across 21 states with a population of 577 million, and WVI in 74 districts across seven states, five states being common to both principal partners.

*"The logistics of Project Axshya sound daunting, but the idea is to extend the impact of our efforts by building new stronger networks for TB control", says Dr Nevin Wilson, Regional Director of The Union South-East Asia Office in New Delhi. "For The Union, we have put in place a good team and are partnering with nine organisations, each with an excellent track record of working with populations in their respective states. This is the core group, but many more will be involved".*

Involving partners across sectors – government, non-governmental organisations, private doctors, technical agencies, affected communities and the media – is a key strategy of Project Axshya. Equally important is the need to recognise and address linkages that continue to sustain TB as a mammoth challenge for India, especially the linkages with poverty and malnutrition, with diseases like diabetes and HIV, and with the use of tobacco.

*"Our national TB control programme has done an outstanding job, but, with about 2 million new cases of TB each year, it is now recognised that TB in India cannot be successfully addressed by the government alone", says Dr Wilson. "Multiple stakeholders across sectors need to work together to expand access to information and services, increase accountability and truly empower communities. This is what Project Axshya seeks to do."*

A special focus of Project Axshya will be those who have had the greatest difficulty accessing information and treatment for TB – women, children, tribal populations, communities living in geographically difficult areas, and vulnerable groups such as people co-infected with TB and HIV. The Union is also simultaneously strengthening work on the linkages that interface with TB.

*"Addressing the linkages of TB with poverty and with non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and expanding partnerships across sectors, are not just wishful thoughts for us – we have set up concrete mechanisms that we hope will feed into Project Axshya very usefully," adds Dr Wilson. The Secretariat of the World Health Organisation's sub-group on TB & Poverty now functions from*



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The Union South-East Asia Office, as does the Secretariat of the national Partnership for TB Care and Control in India. NCDs are a major focus for The Union, especially tobacco control.

**The Union's core partners** in Project Axshya, sub-recipients of the Global Fund grant who will work with The Union to implement Project Axshya in various states, are:

Catholic Bishops Conference of India – Coalition for AIDS and Related Diseases (CBCI-CARD)  
Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI)  
Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI)  
Emmanuel Hospital Association (EHA)  
Mamta Health Institute for Mother and Child (MAMTA)  
Mamta Samajik Sanstha (MSS)  
Population Services International (PSI)  
Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health (REACH)  
Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI).

*“The focus of Project Axshya is on Advocacy, Communication and Social Mobilisation (ACSM) towards universal access to TB care”, says Dr Sarabjit S Chadha, the Project Director. “Through our partners, it will cover a range of activities to empower communities in TB control, advocate for political and administrative support, involve all healthcare providers to increase the reach of TB services, ensure the rational use of drugs and diagnostics, and train on areas of national priority.”*

To orient its nine partner organisations, The Union recently held a five-day training for 73 programme managers, assistant programme managers, district coordinators and finance managers who will implement the project in the field. The training covered basic knowledge of TB and TB control systems, project activities, and areas such as recording and reporting. District TB Officers of the project districts also actively participated in the training, at the end of which each district had developed an activity plan.

*“Infectious diseases like TB spread from person to person”, says Dr Wilson, “and eventually you have millions of people who are sick. With Project Axshya we are reversing the process – spreading information on TB, telling people that it is curable, and empowering them to access services. In this way, we hope to reach millions – and save many lives.”*

## About The Union

The mission of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) is to bring innovation, expertise, solutions and support to address health challenges in low- and middle-income populations. With nearly 10,000 members and subscribers from 152 countries, The Union has its headquarters in Paris and offices serving the Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America and South-East Asia regions. Its scientific departments focus on tuberculosis and HIV, lung health and non-communicable diseases, tobacco control and research. For more information, please visit our website at [www.theunion.org](http://www.theunion.org).

Based in New Delhi, **The Union South-East Asia Office** works in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and other countries through a network of consultants and strong partnerships with governments, civil society, corporations and international agencies. Established in 2003 as The Union's first region office, today it is its largest and brings global experience and expertise to a host of Union services across the region.