

## Gasping For Breath

### How One Man and A Simple Box Are Engaging the community to Fight Against TB

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**Vaishali (Host):** According to the WHO report, in 2018, 30 high tuberculosis burden countries accounted for 87% of the new TB cases. Among that, India leads the 8 countries that account for two thirds of the total, and worldwide, TB was one of the top 10 causes of death.

At the recently concluded 50th Union World Conference on Lung Health, we met with Faiz Anwar from Jharkhand whose simple idea of sending colourful cardboard box with handwritten information and questions about tuberculosis within the community has reaped results. Unlike a pamphlet, the box is big enough to be noticed and is passed on from house-to-house, generating conversations about TB. In May 2019, Faiz piloted the idea for 30 days in Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand, by passing a box with "What do you know about TB?" written on it. According to the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program i.e. RNTCP report in 2018, more than 45,000 patients have been diagnosed with TB in Jharkhand alone, accounting to around 2.25% of Tuberculosis cases in India.

Faiz observed a critical lack of awareness and lack of manpower in RNTCP in the state. During his visits to various districts, he says he often sees TB being seen as a curse and people resorting to traditional medical practices to counter the disease.

Hi! I am Vaishali, reporter for Suno India and i am the guest host for this episode of Gasping For Breath. For this episode, we spoke with Faiz to understand his efforts towards community outreach in the state of Jharkhand. So, tell us Faiz, what drove you to this initiative?

**Faiz:** I came to tuberculosis field in 2014, you can say a turning point of my life when I visited people affected by TB in a village called Cherhi, a small village in which people can't even afford to buy three times meal. I realised that they need more nutritional support although medicines are free but they are unable to fight this disease because of the lack of food. when I went into the field 2014 I started a campaign called 'each one take care of one'. It was a campaign through Facebook where I asked my colleagues, Facebook friends to contribute something towards the community and they started contributing and drive went on for four years. Especially TB patients who are malnourished. After that, REACH is an organisation who is working in tuberculosis so they had a community engagement project. In that project they first made me a mentor and as a mentor I looked after 5-7 TB survivors very closely and work with them for 6 months.

**Vaishali:** How did you come up with the idea of TB Box?

**Faiz:** So, this box Idea came in my mind in the world TB day, 2014. I went to Dhanbad nagar nigam for some work. So Dhanbad Nagar Nigam has got more than 250 employees. Prior to that week I Decided that I'll do some activity since I was involved in the tuberculosis very

much, I did two Nukkad Natak also in the previous world TB day among the community. So in this world TB day I thought that I should come up with some creative idea and then I will think of some implementation. So I came up with the box, a waste box from some mobile shop, one week before world TB day I started preparing this box, started designing this box started writing about what tuberculosis is, about the campaigns and to make India TB free or Dhanbad TB free. I said that keep this box at 1 desk for one day and then pass it on to every desk in a nagar nigam office. So, after 7 days all the Dhanbad Nagar Nigam employees get to know about the box and they were very shocked that what is this initiative. on the box it is written about tuberculosis and there was a question, what do you know about TB? And I have said that you put your signature and then you put your question or you put an answer, whether you know TB how much you know about TB , and how in depth you know about tuberculosis. The answer came from the 150 employees and I was shocked to know that only 10 people gave the right answer. They know very little about tuberculosis, only 10 people out of 150 who are working in an organisation. Awareness is the major factor in urban and rural areas both, so how I can reach a large number of people in a very short time, I thought why not I rotate this box to every office like Dhanbad Nagar Nigam is the biggest Nagar Nigam of Jharkhand and the oldest and it has got the highest number of employees a large number of employees and population from all over the Jharkhand work here. After 6 months or another 7 months I moved this box to another district, Hazaribagh and i ran a similar kind of campaign in which I put the box in one shop in then I say you pass the box to another shop. And it ran for 30 days, and it was run during the whole month of Ramzan where people fast for one whole month. I put that box at one day and I took it before Eid and many suggestions came into the box and the box rotated for many days to 30 shops.

**Host:** After 6 months of being involved in the community outreach, he was made a TB program officer for Reach in Jharkhand. Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health, REACH was established in 1999 and since then, they've been a partner and leader in the fight against TB. Along with others, he travelled across the 24 districts of Jharkhand and brought together TB champions or TB survivors That network of survivors is called TEJ, TB Elimination for Jharkhand.

How does the community engagement help with identifying patients with TB?

**Faiz:** There are many ways to identify it the first way is to get the list from the health department, the DMC and the DTC and then go to their house and the second thing was bring community engagement programs. 33 TB champions altogether did more than 200 community engagement program and from there people started saying that if a person is coughing for more than two weeks and they are sending them to the nearest DMC for treatment.

**Host:** What kind of community programs were they doing? How did they coordinate and do?

**Faiz:** They have been assigned four community engagement programs in one month, one TB champions. So all together  $33 \times 6 = 180$ , right. So what happens is first of all if they need to sensitize a school so they go to talk to the principal that we want to do a community engagement program in their school. they are empowered enough in their capacity that they

know about the TB very well. Now from that school a child's father is a TB survivor, a TB patient, so they will tell him the discussion. From there they get to know that these are the people who are affected by TB and they visit their homes and identify and connect them to the network, talk to them about the tuberculosis. another way was going to the village panchayat, village heads and doing community engagement program like doing candle light campaign with placards and other things, bring rallies and pasting posters and other material per say. Whatever way possible they have used to raise awareness through AC materials and through their story and they use to give psychosocial support to TB patients. Their job was to visit multiple TB patients, more than 30 TB champions met more than 50 TB patients in just six months.

**Host:** So, what was the reaction after you'd passed the TB boxes around in the shops? Did people have more questions? Did the patients reach out to you?

**Faiz:** From Dhanbad Nagar Nigam we did a very grand program in Nagar Nigam on the eve of world TB day which the box was the campaign of that. So we did in-depth sensitization to all the employees, everyday I got a call from someone, somebody, some shop owner, sir my staff is coughing and so they started panicking and they say ki earlier we I didn't knew that TB happens with the bacteria when you cough and it goes to the air, so they didn't know anything. Now this started calling me, sir, where to do the test, so I tell them that if someone is coming for more than 14 days, please send them to the near DMC. This is the impact that the box has created. Everyday one to two calls I used to get and I used to suggest them.

This idea is feasible and can be taken only through the Government of India or any government, at whichever level you want to do, if you want to do it for a panchayat, or at the level of district, if you have to take it to the state level, if the chief minister says that we are running a campaign that TB free box will go to your house and you have to pass it to your neighbour, then everybody will do that because the box is very lightweight nobody will bother to pass as a responsibility that I have to inform people about tuberculosis and hidden cases will also come from there. And because we have got a setup, we just need to rotate that box that's it, because the cost of the box is very easy the school students can make it, in art and craft they spend more than 100-200 rupees, but this box will cost them only 10 to 20 rupees. Every school has got more than 2000 students so making 10 box for them is a very simple thing. This box can be made by NGO also, I mean they have to keep volunteers for that.

**Host:** So, how are you planning on taking this forward?

**Faiz:** We have spent 30 years in educating people about tuberculosis, but people still don't know the basics of TB that it is an airborne diseases they don't know. I am in a mood that if we are ending emergency we have to talk about it and it should become the talk of the town now, right. My plan is if the government won't take it in this 1-2 months, I will start with my own and I will start with mohalla level. Mohalla level means I will start from my ward, I will go to my ward commissioner, he has got the list of every household, now I will go to a school in my ward and then I will give them the details of this talk to the principal in then I will create 10 boxes, right, and then these boxes will go to the ward commissioner and then ward commissioner will rotated in the household. Not for hundred days I will do it for 30 days, for

30 days 10 boxes means more than 3000 households, right. I will get to know, I will do this data collection and everything document this and get the result, try to analyse the result and I will try to focus on how feasible it is in the long run and how I am going to implement it at the district level. Then I will talk to the DC after one month or two. I will not wait to get the approval and all the thing, not go from table to table, I will not contact everybody for this but I will contact those people who will implement the idea from day 1.

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