

Minutes of the meeting of 'ICMR Tribal Health Research Forum' held at the National Institute for Research in Tribal Health, Jabalpur on 8th August, 2015

Fifth annual meeting of Tribal Health Research Forum (THRF) of ICMR was organized by NIRTH, Jabalpur on 8th August, 2015. The meeting was chaired by Dr. V.M. Katoch, Former Secretary, DHR and DG, ICMR. The following members attended the meeting:

1. Dr. V. M. Katoch ... *Chairperson*, Former Director-General, ICMR and DHR,
2. Dr. Neeru Singh... *Coordinator*, Director, NIRTH, Jabalpur
3. Lt. Gen. D. Raghunath... *Advisor*, THRF & SAC Chairman, NIRTH, Jabalpur
4. Directors/ Scientists from 16 Centres and other ICMR institutes and 4 Divisions of ICMR also attended the meeting (Annexure I).

Dr. Neeru Singh, Director, NIRTH, welcomed Dr. V.M. Katoch, Lt. Gen. D. Raghunath, and other participants and requested Dr. V. M. Katoch to chair the meeting and conduct the proceedings.

Dr. Neeru Singh, Director, NIRTH, Jabalpur, Coordinator of the THRF presented the action taken report and highlights of the achievements of the Tribal Health Research Forum. She mentioned that 11 Tribal Health Research Units (TRHUs) were established in various ICMR institutes in the recent past (**Phase-I** NIRTH, Jabalpur, RMRC, Bhubaneswar, RMRC, Port Blair, NIIH, Mumbai, NIN, Hyderabad, RMRC, Dibrugarh, **Phase-II**, RMRC, Belgaum, DMRC, Jodhpur, VCRC, Puducherry, NIE, Chennai, RMRIMS, Patna). She enumerated list of activities being undertaken by these TRHUs in the area of TB, Haemoglobinopathies, etc. Further she mentioned the training on malaria and haemoglobinopathies were carried out in various states of India by NIRTH and NIIH in collaboration with Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MOTA), New Delhi.

Comments/Suggestions:

Chairman praised the progress of work, he commented that the impact of THRF activities was visible and suggested that for further acceleration of work a calendar of targets needs to be prepared for the ongoing activities.

PRESENTATIONS ON THE WORK DONE BY DIFFERENT INSTITUTES, ESPECIALLY ON TRIBAL POPULATION

The project presentations from the participating institutes and the recommendations are as follows.

1. National Institute for Research in Tribal Health (NIRTH), Jabalpur

Dr. Neeru Singh, Director & Scientist 'G' presented the work done at THRU at NIRTH, she specifically highlighted the studies on malaria and sickle cell disease carried out at its Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh) unit and highlighted the effect of sickle cell and protection against malaria. Further, she also mentioned about involvement as a member in the tribal task force for revising health strategies for National Health Mission (NHM) and preparation of anti-malaria drug utilization research protocol for tribal areas in India. She also informed about preparation of electronic data base for haemoglobinopathies and nutritional profile of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in India and that is now made available at the NIRTH web site. As Guest Editor, Director NIRTH coordinated and invited research papers on tribal health for the special issue on tribal health of IJMR which is considered by many experts in the field as first compendium on tribal health. The expansion of tribal health research is also made in difficult and challenging areas i.e. Keylong in Himachal Pradesh.

Comments/Suggestions:

Progress made was appreciated, all the programmes were recommended to be continued and strengthened for the benefit of the tribal people.

2. National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) , Hyderabad

Dr. A. Laxmaiah Scientist 'F' presented the progress and status of various activities of NIN relating to tribals particularly on assessment of nutritional status, health and lifestyle of women etc. and presented future plan for THRU at NIN.

Comments/ Suggestions:

Suggestions were made to identify new knowledge, follow the action taken, assess whether efforts have made impact on tribal population. Further suggestions to identify change in dietary habits due to public distribution system and its effect on malnutrition were made.

3. National Institute of Immunohaematology (NIIH), Mumbai

Dr. Malay Mukherjee, Scientist 'E', presented the progress of activities on multi-centric studies on New born Screening (NBS), G6PD deficiency and prenatal diagnosis.

Comments/ Suggestions:

Suggestions were made to study pneumococcal infection in severe combined immune-deficiency (SCID), continue training and services and start using Covalent Reverse Dot Blot (CRDB) in tribal areas.

4. National Institute of Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT), Chennai.

Dr. Beena Thomas, Scientist 'D' presented the progress of the study on Estimation of the burden of TB among the tribal population and to develop an innovative health system model to strengthen TB control.

Comments/Suggestions:

Suggestions were made to make efforts to integrate the tribal population with other people, teach them how to connect to Govt. Systems, create models to improve access and to encourage/ empower them for getting better jobs.

5. Regional Medical Research Centre (RMRC), Bhubaneshwar, Odisha

Dr. B. Dwibedi Scientist 'D' presented the progress on their study "Management of febrile illness at community level in Rayagada district, Odisha"

Comments/ Suggestions:

Suggestions were made to identify questions for continuing and marching forward, study the changing habits of the tribal populations and create projects to identify the impacts.

6. Regional Medical Research Centre (RMRC), Dibrugarh

Dr. P. Dutta, Director i/c and Dr. P. K. Borah, Scientist-'D' presented the THRF activities relating to Epidemiology and disease burden of Communicable diseases, Vector Borne diseases and Non communicable diseases.

Comments/Suggestions:

It was suggested that medical colleges need to be involved in neoplasm studies, cancer work. Further suggestions were made to fix targets within tribal communities for above diseases and find out whether incidence of Paragonimiasis has decreased; replicate the work in other areas and intervene to bring about changes in food habits and finally develop paragonimiasis elimination as a major project and send to Lt. Gen. Raghunath.

7. Regional Medical Research Centre (RMRC), Port Blair

Dr. P. Vijayachari, Director presented the activities of the center based on the following: Risk reduction / elimination of infectious diseases, Health and nutritional studies -Onges, Great Andamanese, Jarawas and Health profile of the tribes.

Comments/Suggestions:

Suggestions were made to develop collaboration with NIN to study food habits; Identify the parameters for health profile and undertake Tuberculin testing for assessing transmission of tuberculosis.

8. ECD division of ICMR

Dr. Manju Rahi Scientist 'E' presented the activities and new studies funded under tribal sub plan by ICMR.

Comments/ Suggestions:

All the activities were appreciated and recommendation was made to continue to support to the nicely performing THRUs.

9. NCD division of ICMR

Dr. D.K. Shukla Scientist 'G' presented the activities and new studies funded and proposals received for funding by NCD division ICMR.

Comments/ Suggestions:

No Specific comments, activities were appreciated and recommended to be continued.

10. RCH division of ICMR

Dr. Reeta Rasaily, Scientist 'F' presented the activities and new studies funded and proposals received for funding by RCH division ICMR.

Comments/Suggestions:

It was opined that projects related to dwindling tribes need be given priority focusing on issues related to infertility, IMR etc. keeping in view MDGs.

11. National Institute of Epidemiology (NIE), Chennai

Dr. Piyalee Pal spoke on health system preparedness.

Comments/Suggestions:

Suggestions were made to reframe the study from user's perspective and use appropriate statistical tools and groups for analysis

12. National Institute of Medical Statistics (NIMS), New Delhi

Dr. S Banara, Scientist 'F' presented the proposed and approved projects on tribal health and informed that they are awaiting funds for initiation.

Comments/Suggestions:

Suggestion was made to pursue with the funding sources to expedite the matter.

13. National Institute of Malaria Research (NIMR), New Delhi

Dr. Nilima Mishra, Scientist 'E' presented studies on distribution and biological characteristics of the members of *Anopheles Fluviatilis-minimus* group for effective vector control strategies in tribal areas of Odisha. She also presented various other studies carried out by NIMR and malaria outbreak investigations in Tripura (2014).

Comments/ Suggestions:

Suggestions were made to involve state health authority in analysis of situation and keep them updated and motivated to avoid outbreaks in future. It was also emphasized to analyze the environmental data (temperature) carefully, and highlight the differences to predict outbreaks.

14. Division of Nutrition, ICMR New Delhi and DMRC, Jodhpur

Dr. G.S. Toteja, Director, DMRC, Jodhpur presented about malnutrition and other nutritional studies in tribal areas along with studies on hypertension, diabetes etc.

He also presented the proposed work to be done at DMRC Jodhpur under THRU relating to **NCD Risk Factors among Tribal population**.

Comments/ Suggestions:

While appreciating the progress and recommending the programmes of Division of Nutrition, suggestions were made regarding DMRC proposal – to modify the objectives and prioritize the work to best suit the need of tribal communities.

15. Regional Medical Research Centre (RMRC), Belagavi

Dr. S.L. Hoti, Director-in-charge, RMRC, Belagavi presented the mandate and objectives of the THRU, Belgaum and the studies initiated by the centre.

Comments/Suggestions:

It was commented that the unit is in its infancy stage and it needs to proceed as per mandate. Suggestions were made to promote ethno-medicines as an alternative to allopathy or in a situation where no alternative therapy with scientific evidence and effectiveness exists and involve Ayush. This general comment was applicable to other member institutes/ centres as well.

16. Centre for Research in Medical Entomology (CRME), Madurai

Dr. T Mariappan, Director-in-Charge, CRME presented their work on the dengue prevalence among the tribes in Nilgiris and effect of environmental factors. Further he presented the development of data base incorporating comprehensive inventorization and validation of nutritive and medicinal insects in the tribal populations in the Western Ghat region of Tamil Nadu.

Comments/Suggestions:

Suggestion was to continue studies.

17. Rajendra Memorial Research Institute of Medical Sciences (RMRIMS), Patna

Dr. Neena Verma, Scientist 'F' presented the institutes IEC based intervention study on hypertension, pulmonary tuberculosis and drug resistance, and pilot study on hypertension and haemoglobinopathies among the tribal populations.

Comments/Suggestions:

There were no specific comments and all studies were recommended to be continued.

18. National Institute for Research in Reproductive Health (NIRRH), Mumbai

Dr. Smita Mahale, Director, NIRRH, Mumbai presented in brief MCH and adolescence health studies in the tribal areas. She also demonstrated the IEC materials developed by the NIRRH on various reproductive health issues.

Comments/Suggestions:

Suggestions were made to focus on studies on social norms and teen aged pregnancy studies on tribes, alcoholism for developing interventional studies and problems like leprosy for making impact on their lives. Suggestions was also made to share data on snake bite with NIRTH, Jabalpur.

Dr. Raghunath at the concluding session mentioned the need for publishing the research output/ data generated by various ICMR institutes on tribal health in the form of a bulletin of THRF to project a national picture. It was recommended that secretariat for the forum should be permitted recruited to assist the Coordinator in routine functioning, expansion and execution of research activities of the forum. The staff recruited specifically for ICMR- THRF will aid in production of quality publication in the form of a compendium which is a need of the hour.

The meeting ended with vote of thanks by Dr. V. G. Rao, Scientist 'G', NIRTH.