



# TDR AND PARTNERS SUPPORT TB PROGRAMMES IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TB CONTROL

**As the world comes together to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that essential services and operations continue to protect the lives of people with Tuberculosis (TB). Given the potential diversion of resources, shortages of staff, disruption of services, among other factors, new or adapted strategies are required to mitigate the potential impact of COVID-19 on TB control efforts and ensure continuity of TB services and activities.**

The Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), in partnership with the Access and Delivery Partnership Project (ADP<sup>1</sup>), Damien Foundation and The Union, is proudly supporting national TB programmes (NTPs) throughout West and Central Africa to conduct implementation research (IR) on strategies to mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on TB control efforts.

In early May 2020, a call for letters of interest was distributed throughout the [West and Central African Regional Network for TB control \(WARN-TB/CARN-TB\)](#), resulting in 20 submissions from NTPs and their research partners in the region. After a competitive evaluation, 11 submissions were selected.

Selected proposals will implement a variety of new and innovative approaches to ensure continuity of TB services during the time of COVID-19 (see Fig.1). Digital technologies will be applied to help overcome issues of access in light of quarantine-related restrictions on movements, such as conducting virtual teleconsultations with patients, using social media to conduct routine supervisory visits among TB facilities and using digital adherence technologies to promote treatment adherence. Studies will also explore ways to further decentralize TB services into the community, thereby reducing requirements for travel, as well as trialling new screening algorithms to enhance detection of TB among those with respiratory systems and suspected of COVID-19.

<sup>1</sup> [The Access and Delivery Partnership project \(ADP\)](#) is a project led and coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funded by the government of Japan. ADP brings together UNDP, WHO, TDR and PATH in a unique partnership that helps strengthen capacity in LMICs to ensure health technologies reach the people who need them.

**MAURITANIA**

Implementing and evaluating new community-based intervention with using COVID-19 investigations to increase based screening and testing of presumptive TB cases.

**BURKINA FASO**

Evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on TB care seeking.

**COTE D'IVOIRE, NIGER & GABON**

Evaluating the effectiveness of community-based provision TB treatment compared to facility-based treatment.

**SENEGAL**

Evaluating the effectiveness of Teleconsultation strategies as mitigating measures of the impact of COVID-19 on TB care services.

**GUINEA**

- Enhancing routine screening for TB in COVID-19 negative patients and in recovered COVID-19 patients with persistent respiratory signs.
- Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on quality of life of TB patients.

**TOGO**

Assessing the impact of a novel digital patient monitoring device to promote adherence to TB treatment in the context of COVID-19.

**BENIN**

Exploring the feasibility and acceptability of using e technology for training and remote supervision.

**NIGER**

- Evaluating the impact of using e-technology for remote supervision strategy for TB centres to support care compared to routine physical supervision.
- Implementing and evaluating new strategies to improve the screening of suspected TB cases in time of COVID-19.

**BURUNDI**

Implementing a suite of innovative interventions to ensure the continuity of tuberculosis care services in the context of COVID-19.

**Fig 1: Planned IR studies of successful grantees**

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We've seen from past experiences with Ebola the significant impact that an infectious disease outbreak can have on routine health care services, including TB. To mitigate the overall impact of COVID-19, we must ensure that routine health services continue to operate and that those that need them have continued access. The eleven studies selected for funding represent the kind of innovative thinking required to find solutions and overcome barriers and challenges posed by COVID-19. This research will help to maintain crucial TB services in West and Central Africa and will also contribute to future preparedness efforts. I'm really encouraged by the caliber of the proposals we received and am proud to be supporting this work along with our partners.”

**Dr John Reeder, Director, TDR**

Ongoing technical support and mentorship will be provided to grantees during the research period by TDR, ADP, the Union and Damien Foundation. Alongside this support, TDR and partners will be working with WARN-TB/CARN-TB to help evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on NTP performance in the region. The findings of this evaluation, combined with the lessons that emerge from the IR projects, will be used to inform the development of national and regional contingencies plans that can be enacted by NTPs in similar, future scenarios.



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