

SOLOMON ISLANDS PROJECT

Community-based tuberculosis (TB) case finding and treatment support: working with Baru Conservation Alliance rangers in the remote mountain areas of East Kwaio.

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TB remains at unacceptable rates in the East Kwaio area of Solomon Islands. At the Atoifi Adventist Hospital (AAH) approximately 10-15 people are treated for TB each year. In a population of 10,000 this equates to 100-150 cases/100,000 pop. There are many more undiagnosed cases known to occur in mountain areas and distant villages.

The TB program at AAH is part of the National TB Program but due to remoteness, access issues, cultural issues and historical health settings TB remains uncontrolled. The Baru Conservation Alliance (BCA) is a well-respected community agency supporting remote villages and families to maintain the conservation value of the area. BCA has a holistic approach to care for plants, animals and people who live within mountain conservation areas. BCA has conducted a number of important conservation projects with international partners. BCA has a well-trained, capable and willing ranger workforce. The rangers have identified TB as an ongoing threat to the people who live within and manage the conservation areas.

The aims of the project are to:

- To increase TB awareness, case detection rates, and TB treatment completion to reduce transmission of TB in the remote mountain areas of East Kwaio.
- To develop a sustainable enhanced system of TB case detection and treatment support in partnership between BCA conservation rangers in East Kwaio and the TB Program of Atoifi Adventist Hospital (AAH), Malaita, Solomon Islands with the support of Australian public health experts.

Consultation and Awareness

In May and June 2020 the Baru Conservation Alliance met with each tribe in the conservation areas in the mountains to talk about the challenges of TB, the long standing burden of disease in east Kwaio and how the Rangers will work with Baru and the Atoifi hospital to address these issues.

Main points discussed:

- TB remains at unacceptable rates in the East Kwaio area of Solomon Islands.
- TB is a disease that can be easily spread; however, it can be cured
- How the Rangers work can help work with Baru and the hospital to help support TB work in the conservation areas
- TB Ranger workshop was held at Gala
- Select eight rangers from four conservation areas, one male and one female from each area.

In August 2020 a two-day workshop was held in very remote and traditional villages in the central mountains of Malaita. The Baru had organised a two-way training with the rangers learning about TB and the TB Program. There were 12 participants including six rangers from



the four conservation areas, a TB nurse from Atoifi hospital Gideon Fatalaea, a student nurse Solomon, members from Baru and Peter Massey linking in via zoom from Australia.

In the first two days training the rangers learnt about TB, the challenges for TB Services and the hospital in delivering services, how to identify a person with TB, what to look for – 5 signs and symptoms and 5 options/ actions to do when you know someone has TB using practical ways taught by Dr Peter Massey.

We also used the previous TB videos developed by previous project as awareness during the workshop. The training was very practical and appropriate for the local rangers. In fact many of them did not attend formal school, but the way it was taught was amazing – Using their 10 fingers as their textbook.



Figure 1: Gideon Fatalaea Atoifi Hospital TB nurse during the training at Gala in east Kwaio and Dr Peter Massey from the background connecting via zoom from Australia

Signs and Symptoms – using five fingers

First five fingers represents the five signs and symptoms to look including – loss in body weight, coughing with more than two weeks including blood, night sweat, laziness and not thriving for children etc.

Five actions/options

1. Doing nothing even when you identify the patient has signs and symptoms
2. Observation for 1-2 weeks
3. Calling the TB nurse from the hospital for confirmation
4. Helping the patient to the hospital
5. TB nurse or Dr go to see the patient with the Rangers.

The first two days is working with the rangers to learn about TB, signs and symptoms, case finding, and what to do or how to respond.

The other two days of the training is learning and establishing a system how Rangers can work with Baru conservation Alliance through the TB coordinator Mr Esau Kekeubata and working with TB nurse Gideon Fatalaea from Atoifi hospital.



Figure 2: Rangers and participants doing practical activities about the signs and symptoms of TB during the training or workshop at Gala

Outcomes from the workshop

- The workshop or training was a very successful despite Covid-19 and the travel ban. We were able to facilitate the training via zoom meeting

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- Baru to oversee and coordinate the project
- TB coordinator Mr Esau Kekeubata appointed
- Identify Eight rangers (four females and four males) to work in the in the four conservation areas
- Rangers will work through Gideon TB nurse from Atoifi Hospital and the Atoifi hospital systems
- Develop TB flip charts for the rangers to use as their guide. The charts have signs/symptoms and actions points translated into Kwaio language
- Weekly update with rangers every Friday with Esau TB coordinator
- Phone credits for Rangers every week for report and weekly update with Esau and Gideon
- Rangers sent monthly written reports for Baru activities and budget.

Activities and outcomes

- After the training, the rangers went on to do more awareness and consultations for the tribes in the four conservation areas
- Rangers work 3 days per week to do case findings in the four conservation areas
- From August to November rangers have collected a total number of 40 specimens as part of case finding activities
- Rangers also assist and take TB patients to the hospital for more TB testing and x-rays
- The first positive TB case from ranger Sale in November after two months of hard work. This is exciting news and the patient is now on TB treatment and monitored by the rangers in the mountains
- Rangers are happy that this is a good system and is working well, they can help support their people to reduce the burden of TB in their tribal lands and families
- Now we have developed a system of TB case detection and treatment support with Baru conservation Alliance, the Rangers and TB Program of Atoifi Adventist hospital.



Figure 3: TB Ranger – Sale giving tablets to his first TB patient

In November, the Baru team and rangers met with Atoifi Adventist hospital Administration to set a system for the TB program. The Baru team gave a presentation about their work, strategic plans and how it links with the TB Ranger Program. Sale Fuiberi, the TB Ranger from Aifasu shared his experience as a ranger working on the TB project. His story has inspired everyone about his knowledge about TB and his commitment to help his people to finish TB in the mountains. After the presentation the Atoifi staff, especially Lab team are now clear and would like to support the TB Ranger Program in the future. The TB Program really helps the hospital because, rangers have done the big work. Now the CEO, Director of Nursing, the

TB nurse and lab team are clear about the BARU work and the rangers work and would like to support the program, they see it as a good model for working with community and tribal rangers.



Figure 4: TB Ranger Sale and TB nurse from Atoifi Hospital sharing stories and challenges about their TB work to Atoifi Staff

Challenges

- Covid-19 travel restriction, international partners could not visit us in the Solomon Islands
- Internet connection
- Relocation of BARU base from Gala island in east Kwaio to Auki the capital of Malaita province
- Distance for the rangers to walk between villages
- Distance for rangers to get sputum bottle from the hospital to the hamlets and back
- Weather - rain, flood and wind caused big challenges for rangers to walk to the hospital with specimens. If the specimens don't arrive on the same day, they are spoiled and need to re-collected again
- Systems and mechanisms at the hospital were not clear at first, so some of the sputums specimens were destroyed. However, after the presentation things are clear and systems are now in place.



Figure 5: Atoifi Adventist hospital staff, and members listening to BARU team and Rangers during the presentation

Next steps

- Continue to do awareness about TB using the previous TB videos previous funded by ARC
- BARU to continue support the work of Rangers in their TB work
- Rangers to continue with their work visiting families in the conservation area and talk with them about TB check for symptoms and support families with TB
- Continue to build the network with the hospital
- TB rangers continue support patients on TB treatment
- Extend the developed system of TB case detection and treatment support with Baru conservation Alliance, Rangers, TB program of Atoifi Adventist hospital, Malaita province and Solomon Islands
- Reflection and evaluation workshops
- Successful stories and lesson learnt from the rangers that can be in a narrative stories and small videos.



Figure 6: A Female TB ranger Fiiringi talking with a suspected patient