

Perhaps COVID-19 pandemic was a rude awakening for us. History also tells us that bold and audacious steps offer the greatest opportunity for success. For TB, that is the only hope.

In the last century, smallpox was vanquished because we dared to dream big. Are we ready to dream big and bold for TB? I don't think we have any options. For too long we have let incremental progress lull us into complacency. We need to cut to the chase.

The TB situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic bomb – within the first 6 months of lockdown, NHLS diagnoses, and case notifications were down approximately 35-40%.

As a clinician I can also tell you that we cannot address a disease unless we sufficiently understand its epidemiology and have data to effectively combat it. A basic question to start with: Why does the disease continue unabated despite remarkable biomedical progress we have had in the past decades? It is well known that tuberculosis is a by-product of poverty.

When we look at the countries with high burden of tuberculosis see that all these countries have something in common. It is not just mycobacterium tuberculosis in the air, but poverty, malnutrition, overcrowding and a health system, which can't cope with basic challenges.

To address tuberculosis, the first step is that we need to stop thinking of biomedical solutions only. TB is social disease made worse by poor political will and commitment for its control. I strongly believe TB control needs to be taken up by all of us as a developmental issue. I would also say that the responsibility of TB control needs to move from doctors to medical administrators and politicians! We need to tackle tuberculosis with the same audacity we amassed to fight COVID-19.

We cannot put price in saving lives. People afflicted by TB are among those most disadvantaged and their situation can be best explained by what Mother Theresa described – *“Hungry for love, He looks at you. Thirsty for kindness, He begs of you.*

*Naked for loyalty, He hopes in you. Homeless for shelter in your heart, He asks of you.
Will you be that one to Him?"*

Immediate response: TB Recovery Plan

Distinguished guests,

admired for its scientific excellence, steady decline in disease burden, and early adoption of new technologies, such as molecular diagnostics and shorter treatment regimens.

I therefore put it to you: How then shall we live and work together to get control of this TB epidemic to place it back on track?

The 4 tracks of the conference will provide a wonderful opportunity to participants. Track 1 will cover the pathogenesis of TB; track 2 will be about drugs/vaccines/diagnostics; track 3 will deal with implementation and health systems;

