

## ICMR sets up consortium to tackle TB

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A drone buzzing over remote villages of Madagascar island in Africa, lands in a health centre. The location does not have motorable roads. A health worker loads vials of blood samples onto a box and puts it inside the drone.

The drone buzzes a few miles away and lands on the terrace of a community health centre. The samples are collected for testing by a lab worker there. “This is being done on experimental basis in Africa to enhance detection and treatment of tuberculosis in remote areas,” said Dr Peter Small, Founding Director of US-based Global Health Institute.

Up to 10 members of the International Scientific Advisory Group (ISAG) of India TB Research and Development Corporation (ITRDC), formed by the ICMR, amongst others were discussing new measures to reduce the TB burden on India. ITRDC has an in-principle approval from Prime Minister’s office. ISAG involves officials from Ministry of Health, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Science and Tech, World Health Organization (WHO) and Gates Foundation.

“Just like seen in this video, even India has many inaccessible areas with no access to treatment. We aim in this meeting to achieve elimination by investing in new drugs, diagnostics, vaccines and technology,” commented Dr Soumya Swaminathan, head, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

ISAG deliberations on testing of newer diagnostic tests and vaccines will lead to newer trials and evaluations in India for TB.

“Indigenously developed Nucleic Acid Test which is a molecular biology diagnostic tool will undergo first round of field evaluation as advised by ISAG. Also, we are trying to get Phase III clinical trials for recombinant BCG vaccine developed a German scientist to India. We need a vaccine when aiming at eradicating any infectious disease,” Swaminathan said.

Seventeen lakh TB cases are registered in India every year. WHO estimates that India has 28 lakh cases of which upto 11 lakh go missing. “By 2025 we are aiming at reducing incidence and mortality by upto 95%. This is a huge challenge for us,” said Dr Sunil Khaparde, deputy director general (TB), Union Health Ministry.