Field-Building Dimension 2: Innovative research approaches and measures for generating systematic and rigorous knowledge of, and engaging people in action towards, people-centred health systems

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Title: Public Private Partnerships for TB Control in India: What role for social theory in Health Systems Strengthening?

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Background: Public Private Partnerships (PPP) are increasingly utilised as a public health strategy for strengthening health systems. Processual evaluation of these partnerships have focused on global and national level partnerships with less attention paid to how individual partnerships are put into practice at the local health systems level. Partnerships are complex systems that rely on relationships between a myriad of different actors with divergent agendas and backgrounds. To understand them a multi-disciplinary perspective that draws on insights from social theory is needed. This study fills this gap by analysing implementation processes relating to Public-Private Mix (PPM)-TB policy in India, with a focus on the district level.

Methods: In-depth ethnographic research was conducted over a 14 month period, combining participant observations, informal interactions and in-depth interviews with a wide range of respondents across public, private and non government organisation (NGO) sectors.

Results: Drawing on the theoretical insights from Bourdieu's "theory of practice" and Lipsky's "street level bureaucrats" this study explores the relationships between the different actors. The study found that programme managers, frontline TB workers, NGOs, and private practitioners all played a crucial role in TB partnerships. They were widely regarded as valued contributors with distinct social skills and capabilities, within their organizations and professions. However, their potential contributions towards programme implementation tended to be misrecognised both at the top and bottom of the policy implementation chain. They constantly struggled for recognition and used different mechanisms to position themselves vis-à-vis other actors within the program. Different perceptions of each other and inadequate communication further complicated the relationships between different actors.

Conclusion: The study demonstrates the impact of utilising social theory to build frameworks that allow us to gain a better understanding of the complex relationships within health systems. Such a framework can improve partnership implementations and strengthen health systems for the future.