



Social marketing campaign in the fight against tuberculosis in Tanzania

The general availability of fixed-dose combination tablets (FDCs) and the option given to patients of taking treatment at home (the patient-centered approach) enable the Tanzanian National Tuberculosis and Leprosy Programme (NTLP) to accompany the improvement of treatment methods with an intensive social marketing campaign. Financed by the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, the NTLP will be implementing the various methods of social marketing - initially in three districts – until February 2008.

Focus on education

Alongside the general fight against poverty, two underlying difficulties remain to be resolved:

Lack of awareness: A large number of people in Tanzania are unfamiliar with the symptoms of tuberculosis – coughing, night sweats, weight loss, etc. Instead of having a sputum smear test done, they seek traditional healers who may at best be able to relieve the symptoms, but are expensive and ultimately ineffective.

Stigmatization: Particularly in connection with HIV/Aids, TB sufferers often suffer from a great deal of prejudice.

These underlying difficulties can only be resolved via a fundamental change in attitude, achieved by means of well-conceived campaigns that make use of all the available tools of social marketing. On March 3, 2007 Tanzania's national social marketing campaign was launched by NTLP with the support of the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development.

Formulating core messages

Based on preliminary studies, the Social Marketing and Health Promotion Unit of the Ifakara Health Research and Development Centre (IHRDC), which was commissioned to carry out the campaign, formulated its core messages:

- Anyone suffering from coughing for more than two weeks should go to a healthcare center for a sputum smear test.
- If the test result is positive, treatment should begin immediately.

- Tuberculosis is a curable infectious disease.
- Treatment is free and can be carried out either at a health center or at home, under the supervision of a person chosen by the patient.

The following important accompanying messages arose from the preliminary investigations:

- Tuberculosis is not necessarily associated with HIV/Aids. It is, however, advisable to have an Aids test done at the same time as the TB smear test.
- There is no justification for the stigmatization or even complete social ostracism of tuberculosis sufferers.
- FDCs with the antibiotic drug rifampicin as their main component considerably reduce the duration of treatment and the number of tablets to be taken on a daily basis.

Diverse communication channels

In order to spread their messages, and given the poor coverage by traditional media (press, TV and radio) in rural areas in particular, IHRDC staff are focusing strongly on interpersonal communication. Their aim is to make the information an important topic of conversation in the primarily agricultural families and village communities. This is achieved above all via a mobile street theater that uses scenes of traditional dance and song to present the symptoms of the illness and how it can be successfully treated. Supporting measures include the posting of billboards and the distribution of leaflets and brochures, and adverts are also transmitted regularly via local FM radio. In parallel to these measures, village leaders, religious dignitaries and other important figures are recruited as multipliers, and workshops are provided for medical staff in hundreds of healthcare units.

The chosen strategy proved its effectiveness right at the start of the campaign on March 3 in Arusha where, before the introductory speeches had even finished, around 20 listeners presented themselves for a TB test in the healthcare center next to the square opposite the weekly market.

The campaign is currently being implemented in the districts of Kahama (Shinyanga region) and Mufindi (Iringa region) as well as in Arusha municipality until February 2008. The evaluation of the campaign will provide the necessary information to NTLP for defining further action.