TB REACH NATIONAL TUBERCULOSIS PROGRAMME

Finding and treating people with TB in

Democratic Republic Of Congo Equateur

- Focus on indigenous pygmy and other semi-nomadic groups helps find TB cases in a dense rainforest area
- 30% increase in case detection over 2010 figures
- Involving local community leaders has helped acceptance of the project in some of the most hard to reach and isolated areas

Equateur Province - The dense equatorial forest and high rainfall in the central region of the Democratic Republic of Congo make for continually poor road conditions, where roads even exist. This is one of the greatest deterrents for tuberculosis (TB) case detection in the area; access to health centers from remote villages is extremely difficult. Added to this is the wide cultural diversity in Equateur province, each sector with its own taboos and traditions. For instance, the Kitawala sect opposes Western health care in general and the indigenous pygmies, already discriminated against, will not share health services with the Bantu or the area's resident and semi-nomadic fisher people.

To combat these conditions and improve case detection, the National Leprosy and Tuberculosis Programme has designed several intervention packages that take into account the capacity of each area to accept and implement them. Volunteer teams are being trained to go directly into the villages of special population groups to identify, in culturally sensitive ways, contacts of those already diagnosed with the disease. Sputum samples are obtained from those persons with signs of TB. The samples are transported to distant diagnostic centers by bicycle and canoe where necessary and returned in the same fashion. This has made it unnecessary for the patient to undertake the onerous and often impracticable journey him/herself, thus increasing the number of identified cases and helping stop transmission.

Local leaders, traditional and religious, as well as local administrative authorities have been enlisted to help involve community members. Although behavioral changes are slow, they are beginning to show results. There has been a significant increase in case detection with an increase of almost 1,000 TB cases compared to 2010 figures after nine months of activities.

Stop TB Partnership