

World TB Day this year is commemorated in Ethiopia for the 6<sup>th</sup> time. The idea of WTB Day goes back to 1982, when on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March the centenary of the discovery of the TB bacillus in 1882 by Robert Koch was celebrated.

This year's theme, "*DOTS cured me, it will cure you too*" reflects that the strategy to combat TB, named as the DOTS strategy, has been adopted worldwide by nearly all countries where TB is still a major public health issue. Among these countries are the 22 so-called "high burden countries", including Ethiopia, which together have to cope with 80% of the TB cases in the world. This almost universal adoption of DOTS reflects the success of the strategy in the control of TB which has now been observed and documented for 20 years. The main five cornerstones of DOTS are: political commitment, uninterrupted drug supply, standardized recording and reporting, a functional laboratory network for sputum examination and "directly observed treatment, short course".

Ethiopia adopted the DOTS strategy ten years ago, beginning within a few zones of Oromiya. The TB and Leprosy Control Programme under the Department of Disease Prevention and Control at the Federal Ministry of Health has successfully managed to expand the DOTS strategy to all regions and all except a few zones in the country. To date, DOTS is operational in virtually all Hospitals and Health Centres in Ethiopia. Increasing numbers of Health Stations are involved in the provision of TB treatment in order to have the treatment situated as close to the patients as possible. With 45% of Health Stations currently involved in the provision of TB treatment, the TB programme aims at having all remaining facilities covered by the year 2005.

These activities have led to a steady increase in the number of TB patients diagnosed and treated over the years, with more than 107,000 new cases being registered in 1994 EC alone (July 2001-June 2002). Of all these patients, 36,000 had sputum-smear-positive or infective form of TB, which can be easily transmitted into the general population.

The combined effort of all the health workers within TB control, from the woreda level up to the central unit at the MOH has led to the remarkable result that the proportion of infective patients who have been successfully treated for a total of 8 months gradually increased over the years and reached 81% (only 4% short of the global target of 85%) in the last reporting year.

Notwithstanding these marked achievements, TB is not yet "under control" in Ethiopia, similar to most other high burden countries. Many TB patients are not detected timely. Serious constraints are faced by the population as well as by the TB control programme, such as inaccessibility of health facilities and insufficient numbers of staff at all levels to cope with the epidemic (as well as a severe HIV epidemic) just to cite a few. HIV weakens the defense system of a person that is infected and as a consequence, TB develops easily or is more easily acquired. On the other hand, TB accelerates the progression of HIV in a person that has both infections. The combination of both infections fuels the TB epidemic.

The TB & Leprosy Control Programme of the MOH has the tremendous task to address these aspects of the TB epidemic and World TB Day is a milestone in the road to successful TB control in Ethiopia. Thanks to consistent support from partners, such as the German Leprosy Relief Association, the Royal Netherlands Embassy and the World Health Organization as well as the recent additional support from the Global Fund against Aids, TB and Malaria, the TB programme will be in the position to foster major progress in TB control in Ethiopia in the forthcoming years.