

Finding and treating people with TB in

Zambia

- The project offers complete TB screening and HIV testing for prison inmates
- Project is finding high rates of TB and HIV among prisoners
- The project brings state of the art diagnostic equipment to a population with little or no previous access to services



Lusaka – For some inmates at Lusaka Central Prison, their daily activities go beyond the bounds of an ordinary prison routine. Thanks to a project run by the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIDRZ), they have been trained as inmate tuberculosis (TB) Peer Educators to screen for TB and make referrals. On screening days, the peer educators help assemble inmates and collect sputum samples for testing under fluorescence microscopy. Then when the clinical officers and nurses arrive they oversee a procession of inmates passing through a series of tents for registration, TB symptom screening, HIV counseling and testing, and then for a chest x-ray inside the mobile digital x-ray unit.

The inmate TB Peer Educator programme is one of the innovative approaches CIDRZ is using to identify more cases of TB in Zambian prisons. They have been working with the Zambia Prisons Service since August 2010 to carry out TB and HIV screening in three of Zambia's prisons. "Empowering inmates to lead the fight against TB is a key part of this programme," says Sisa Hatwiinda, Nurse and Program Coordinator. "Without the inmate TB Peer Educators we simply wouldn't be able to reach so many inmates, diagnose as many TB and HIV infections and prevent deaths." The programme has found 23% HIV rates among prisoners and TB in 2.5% of those screened.

The programme is also using the latest generation of mobile digital radiology equipment to aid in the detection of TB cases. When test results show the need for consultation with a more experienced physician, digital x-ray images are sent via mobile phone network for remote reading. CIDRZ works closely with the Ministry of Health and the Zambia Prisons Medical Service so that inmates diagnosed with TB and/or HIV are referred to the National TB and ART Programmes for treatment and follow-up.

The programme offers additional benefits for the peer educators themselves. "Helping as a TB Peer Educator has been a good way to increase my skills for a future job. When I get out of here I'll be able to say that I helped screen the entire prison for TB. Because of this screening programme we all know we are safer during the hours that we spend inside the cells; we know that we are free of TB. It has made a difference in the lives of all the inmates here," said one Inmate TB Peer Educator at Lusaka Central Prison.

