

Finding and treating people with TB in

Kenya

- Community health workers work with chemists, shopkeepers and others to identify TB cases
- More than 60,000 people screened in the first nine months of the project
- Increased community involvement is leading to greater awareness and understanding



Mombasa – People going to the Hearbie Chemist in Tudor to purchase medicines have recently discovered that their neighborhood chemist is now offering a life-saving extra service- as a sputum collection center for tuberculosis (TB) testing. The staff there, working in concert with a dedicated community health worker, has been trained for this work by International Medical Corps (IMC). Clients who hadn't suspected their symptoms could be signs of TB are now encouraged to be screened and receive free counseling and diagnosis. This local center is owned by Margrate Masifwa, a community nurse who chose to partner with IMC in the fight against TB following her experience as a treatment supporter for a family member.

Kenya's TB mortality rate is high and particularly bad in the Coast Province, with its concentration of urban poor and a rural population with only tenuous access to health services of any kind. Recognising these challenges, the International Medical Corps team, initiated its programme in the Coast Province, as well as four other regions of Kenya, in September 2010. Central to this project is a close working relationship with local communities, whether within the coastal cities or in the hard-to-reach mountainous interior, and at the core of these relationships are 175 newly trained community health workers. These workers not only support the new diagnostic points, they also go door to door in remote areas, on bicycles supplied by International Medical Corps, providing a constant and local source of health care information, and acting as treatment supporters. The supporters ensure that diagnosed patients take their drugs on time and keep clinic appointments which are central to successful TB care.

Working alongside the volunteers, as in the case of Hearbie Chemist, are local people - including traditional medicine men, shopkeepers or chemists - who assist in screening for and disseminating information about TB and its treatment. Local people no longer have to travel to a far away government clinic or diagnostic center to receive help or information. The Kenyan Division of Leprosy, TB and Lung Disease have also played a vital role throughout the project, providing support through training and monitoring of all the TB activities. The emphasis on community involvement in diagnosing and treating TB in Kenya has resulted in greater awareness and understanding of the disease and has promoted a sense of responsibility for and empowerment over health care in the community at large.

"Through the project I have been able to improve the health of my community and learn about disease control," says one community health worker. "These are things that will support the community in the long term." The structures and people that are now in place to help manage TB in the Coast Province will remain long after the project itself comes to an end.

