

Finding and treating people with TB in

Tanzania

- State of the art diagnostics is brought into poor rural areas to offer the best in TB and HIV care
- Almost 60% increase in TB case notifications in project areas
- First time that Xpert MTB/RIF has been used at a community level on a mobile van



Mbeya - In the Mbeya Region of Tanzania a revolutionary new diagnostic technology is changing the health outlook of rural communities and the health staff that serve them. Since late in 2010, a partnership between the University of Munich and the National Institute for Medical Research, has begun screening hard-to-reach communities for tuberculosis (TB). Patients suffering from the disease who had previously tested negative using conventional, 100 year old procedures are now being identified and receiving treatment. Not only can they now hope to get well, they no longer spread the disease through their families and communities. The mobile van carrying the new technology functions as an HIV testing center and the side of the van doubles as a screen for the community to view films where it is parked in the evenings.

The University of Munich and the National Institute for Medical Research project has resulted in increased case detection in the project areas which include some urban areas and prisons as well.

The new diagnostic tool, the Xpert MTB/RIF test, provides a result in less than two hours, as compared to days or even weeks using conventional smear and culture diagnosis, and is bringing state of the art technology to the Mbeya Region. Because the turn-around time for diagnosis is so much shorter than that for conventional screening, patients no longer have to come back several times before they get results, which can prove burdensome for people who are only able to access health facilities with difficulty. They can wait for the results and begin treatment the same day, eliminating the cost of return trips to health facilities which by itself can impede good care for these populations. This new capability, made possible by TB REACH, has improved both the likelihood that people will be willing to go through the process of being tested for TB and the chances of better outcomes, due to earlier treatment.

TB case detection has more than doubled in the project area compared to the previous year and Dr. Petra Clowes, the leader of the initiative in Tanzania noted "This is the first time that this new diagnostic tool has been used at a community level at rural health centers and on a mobile van. It is quite exciting to see the immediate benefits of such amazing technology among populations that previously had such poor access to healthcare."

