

Finding and treating people with TB in

Yemen

- Contact investigation in TB patient's homes benefits women and the elderly
- Activities continued despite considerable political unrest
- Primary beneficiaries are those with poor access to care



Sana'a - Daily life in Yemen's capital city of Sana'a has suffered great disruption during the ongoing political crisis that began in the spring of 2011. Despite considerable challenges, the Yemen National TB Institute, together with the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, has continued to carry out a project which started in January 2011. The project aims to increase case detection in three particularly hard-to-reach groups: women, children and the elderly. Possibly because of their elevated status in Yemeni culture, men appear to have better access to health services. Cultural attitudes affect the ability of women to seek care, as they must usually be accompanied by a man when going out. The elderly are similarly dependent on the availability and willingness of other family members

to accompany them. The risk of cross-infection in these large family groups is high. In Sana'a one in ten households with an identified case of TB has a second case at home. Home visits conducted by culturally attuned health workers are therefore pivotal in obtaining sputum samples and identify cases. This project aims to increase the detection of TB by conducting home visits to all "household contacts" (particularly women, elderly people and children) living in the homes of patients who seek TB treatment and inviting them to undergo TB diagnostic procedures if they have any signs or symptoms suggestive of TB. As many children are unable to produce sputum they are referred to hospital to complete the diagnostic procedure.

Since the danger for children is especially high, with 60% of children diagnosed with TB failing either to begin treatment or to carry treatment through the second month, educating mothers, who are often uninformed about TB, in the risk of untreated disease, is a very important part of the home visit. Relieving stigma and explaining the diagnostic process has helped women be better caretakers of their own and their children's health.

Despite constraints resulting from the political and economic situation, active case finding through contact investigation has shown to be quite effective. Just from April-June 2011, more than 4000 patients have been screened and TB case finding has remained steady, even as other basic services have been shut down in the project area.

