Integrating self-sustaining community structures into TB control in Malawi.

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Background
- Limited knowledge and access are barriers to diagnosis and treatment of TB for poor communities
- Chronic cough and other common health complaints are already self-diagnosed at a community level through grocery stores
- Integrating storekeepers has been successful in malaria and TB treatment, but has not been explored for TB case finding
- Ownership of interventions is key to sustainable participation of the public, private and voluntary sectors

Aims
1. To explore the potential role of storekeepers and community groups in TB control in a poor urban community
2. To empower an urban community and the city health team to develop a sustainable community-based health education intervention
3. To develop a research protocol to study the impact of this intervention

1. A role for storekeepers in TB control?

Methods
- Key informant interviews, in-depth discussions, focus group discussions, drama in public meetings

Participants
- chiefs, counsellors, market managers, storekeepers, groups of men and women, health workers at city community assembly and national level

Findings
- Storekeepers know the symptoms of TB and want to relieve their customers but think they may be considered uncultured
- A broader health strategy is needed for TB and malaria to decrease the stigma of addressing TB/HIV
- Community sensitisation of the new health role of storekeepers is essential
- Community-based monitoring may motivate storekeepers
- Community leaders already promote health and seek further knowledge and skills
- HIV/AIDS health education and home-based care groups exist and want to support the storekeepers and community leaders in a health role

2. Development of a community-based intervention

- Community health committee developed draft proposal at 2 day workshop
- Community health committee presented the proposal to City Assembly health management team
- Project steering group agreed to develop the budget and finalize the proposal
- Coordinators of the community HIV/AIDS health education groups reviewed draft plan

3. Development of a research protocol

- Malawi National TB Programme, National Malaria Control Programme and the EQUA-TB Knowledge Programme (Malawi & Liverpool) developed the research components
- Project Steering Group, community leaders and health committee reviewed draft proposal

Current status of the project
- The Operational Research Project was funded by the Malawi National TB Programme & The Nkweghe and Lung Association (LHL)
- The project commenced in April 2003 with the EQUA-TB Knowledge Programme, Lilongwe, Malawi
- The steering group is actively managing the project & developing intervention
- Partners reviewed research strategy for baseline to commence November 2003

Key messages
- Qualitative methods allowed the identification of local structures with an existing health role
- Self-sustaining local structures are willing to participate in improving healthcare
- Empowering communities facilitates active partnership with public partners
- Public private partnerships require a slow negotiation process and an agreed project objective – the private partners must also benefit
- External facilitators can assist in establishing a collaboration between communities and the public sector rather than a traditional vertical structure