

# Leaving No Child Behind, Religious Leaders Work with Breakthrough ACTION to Beat a Subtle Killer Disease

During a regular visit to the Federation of Muslim Women Association Nigeria (FOMWAN) orphanage in Ibadan, Oyo, Alhaja Bushrah noticed that one of the children, 14-year-old Taofeek, was unwell. Taofeek had been coughing for a while. He also had chest pain, was feverish, and had lost weight. The orphanage homecare team took Taofeek to the hospital for treatment, where he was given cough syrup, but he did not improve. Alhaja Bushrah suspected Taofeek might have tuberculosis (TB) and was concerned about possible devastating consequences on him and other children at the orphanage if he did not receive treatment immediately.



*Alhaja Bushrah visiting children of the FOMWAN Orphanage: Credit: Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria*

Breakthrough ACTION, the global social and behavior change (SBC) flagship project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), works in Nigeria to improve positive health behaviors among community members. This includes supporting adults and children who may have symptoms suggestive of TB to get tested and treated as soon as possible. Getting these messages out to community members can be lifesaving. Because TB is infectious, getting tested and treated as quickly as possible also reduces the spread to others.

Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria works with religious and traditional leaders who are well known in the communities, are influential, and are trusted. The project learned that Nigerians who are sick often turn to religious and traditional leaders for spiritual advice and assistance, so Breakthrough ACTION engages the leaders and encourages them to pass on messages that increase awareness about TB so people with potential TB symptoms can know how to get the test and treatment they need as soon as possible. Alhaja Bushrah, who is also the President of FOMWAN in Oyo, attended a training held by Breakthrough-

ACTION Nigeria where she and other religious and traditional leaders learned about TB, how it is spread, its symptoms, and what to do when someone has the symptoms. She also learned how TB affects children and how it can often go undetected. This information was especially important since she provides care to children in orphanages.

With this information, when she saw Taofeek, she quickly realized his symptoms were likely TB. She contacted the Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria team to visit the orphanage. They collected Taofeek's sputum sample for a TB test.

According to Alhaja Bushrah, "At the time, I found out he had been coughing for more than two weeks. My knowledge about the symptoms of TB made me request that Taofeek be tested to confirm if this was TB or not."

Taofeek tested positive for TB and was immediately treated. Twenty-four other children, teachers, and caregivers at the orphanage received screening and testing to identify those who were also infected. Thankfully, they tested negative for TB. Other children were placed on preventive treatment.

Working with religious and traditional leaders like Alhaja Bushrah reached Nigerian adults and children effectively with lifesaving information about TB. Taofeek is back to good health, and his friends at the orphanage also remain healthy.

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