

# Saving Lives and Livelihoods

## Trained Medicine Vendors in Nigeria Refer Tuberculosis Patients for Treatment

Through Breakthrough ACTION's local strategic engagement initiative, trained medicine vendors refer community members with presumptive cases of Tuberculosis (TB) to the nearest treatment center using a simplified referral card.

About one in three Nigerians makes their living from small enterprises like trading and the provision of services.<sup>1</sup> Two such Nigerians live in Bauchi State: Tasiu Umar, a popular *mai shayi* (ready-to-drink tea and noodles seller) in Gamawa Local Government Area (LGA), and Bello Wanzam, a local barber in Giade LGA. Both men, who are in their 20s, could not make any income from their businesses for about a year due to ill health. Both had a cough that refused to go away. Like many Nigerians, Tasiu and Bello were unaware of the causes and symptoms of TB or how to get treatment for it. As such, they tried several alternative treatments for cough, including local herbs and cough medicines, but nothing changed.



*Tasiu Umar in front of his tea shop in Gamawa LGA after recovery. Credit: Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria*

Tasiu's persistent cough, much stronger at night—his business' peak working hours—drove his customers and friends away. The 27-year-old became distant from his community and could not make his average daily income of about US \$3.00. Tasiu had to use his running capital for the business to support his aged mother and the six siblings he cares for. Tasiu said he almost gave up on life, as everybody but his mother isolated him.

In a similar situation, Bello could not continue with his traditional barbering business because he could not stand on his feet, a requirement for his line of work. He tried to treat the cough with several known traditional medicines and cough syrups for almost a year with no improvement.

With funding from the United States Agency for International Development, the Breakthrough ACTION project in Nigeria has worked to support the National and State Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control Programs (STBLCP) in helping Nigerians better understand TB. This includes partnering with trusted community members who can help deliver the message about TB. Community members turn to

<sup>1</sup> National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria. (2017). *National survey of micro small & medium enterprises (MSMEs) 2017*. <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/eLibrary/read/966>

religious and traditional leaders, medicine vendors, and other influential groups when sick and do not know what to do. Since 2020, the project has partnered with **2,300** medicine vendors, **1,255** religious and traditional leaders, and **631** local community groups and civic organizations on TB in communities where TB is high. Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria trains these individuals on the causes and symptoms of TB and on what to do when someone from the community comes to them with symptoms of TB.

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*As it is now, once I hear people coughing persistently, I instantly direct them to the treatment center at Gamawa General Hospital. So far, I have referred seven people, and four of them, who were positive, are currently on treatment.*  
—Tasiu Umar

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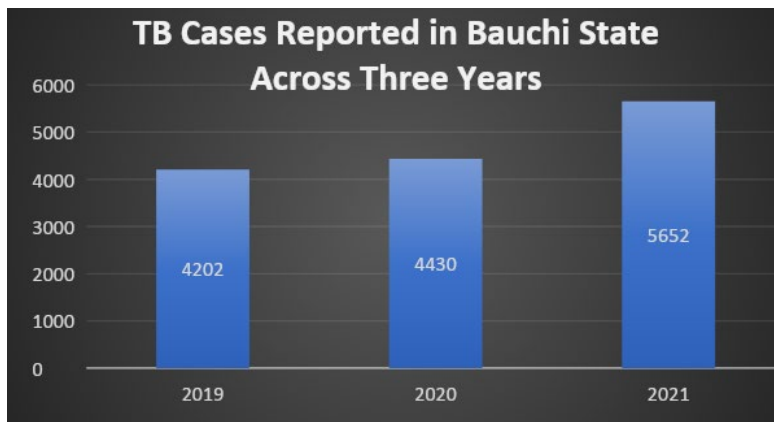
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*If not for the owner of that [patent medicine store], I would have been dead by now. Not only did he refer me to [the testing and treatment center], but he also gave me about [US \$3.00] for transportation, as I didn't have money on me at the time.*  
—Bello Wanza

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Through this approach, Tasiu and Bello received the treatment they needed. They both visited the shop of a medicine vendor who partners with Breakthrough ACTION Nigeria. The medicine vendor understood their symptoms were likely TB and referred them to the nearest treatment center.

Both men were tested, diagnosed with TB, and began treatment immediately. They recovered and returned to their businesses to continue providing for their families. Thrilled by this positive development and the fact that both diagnosis and treatment are free, both men—alongside other patients in the state—have now become voluntary TB ambassadors. They refer people with symptoms to treatment centers and spread awareness that TB is curable with free treatment provided by the government.



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*In one year, figures from Bauchi STBLCP showed that reported cases rose by over 25%, from 4,430 in 2020 to 5,652 in 2021. This figure is projected to significantly increase when the 2022 figures are added.*  
—Dr. Yakubu Abdullahi, Program Manager, Bauchi STBLCP

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