

From Classrooms to Communities: Empowering Students as Change Agents for Tuberculosis Case Finding in Nigeria



*Blessing and her classmates reading TB educational material shared during their school health club.
Credit: Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria*

In the heart of Calabar Municipal of Cross River state, nestled within the vibrant community of Ikot Effanga Mkpa, a silent battle against tuberculosis (TB) has been unfolding. Over the years, available data identified this community as a hotspot for TB, necessitating relentless efforts to find and put those with the disease on treatment and cut down community transmission. Through various activities, the community's resilience and the collaboration between Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria, the State Tuberculosis, Leprosy, and Buruli Ulcer Control Programme, and other implementing partners have brought about transformative interventions. One such activity led a child to help save her neighbors' lives.



The story began when Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria trained 1,129 teachers from 594 schools across 57 local government areas in Cross River, Bauchi, Plateau, Kano, the Federal Capital Territory, Akwa Ibom, Benue, and Nasarawa states on TB and explained its impact on children, families, and the community and the role the teachers and their students can play in educating their communities. The teachers left the training as change agents for TB with the confidence to provide correct information and make referrals. After the training, many teachers hosted school health club sessions with their students, passing these messages to their students.

During one such school health club session, Blessing Asuquo Okon, a 14-year-old student from Government Secondary School, Ikot-Effanga, learned about TB from her teacher, Wonder Enyieko. Because of what she learned, she recognized possible TB symptoms in children in her community. She quickly alerted her school club coordinator, who in turn reached out to Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria. A chain of events around screening and testing then unfolded that changed the lives of this family for the better.

Breakthrough ACTION staff visited the family and took samples from a breastfeeding mother and her nine-month-old son, Gideon. The Gene-Xpert test results confirmed that baby Gideon had TB. Gideon has started treatment and is journeying toward health and recovery because of young Blessing's bravery and attentiveness.

TB impacts children and often goes undetected and undiagnosed. This puts children at an even higher risk for TB. Teachers are positioned well to address this challenge because of their regular interactions with school children and because communities respect them as trusted messengers. However, they may not know accurate information about TB and how to encourage people coughing for two weeks or more to get tested for TB, hence Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria's approach to engaging teachers first.

The state TB team has also begun the critical process of contact tracing to identify the source of Gideon's infection. They will also administer TB preventive treatment for family and community members who may be at risk. They are also proactively encouraging community members to get a TB test if they have TB symptoms.

For Ikot Effanga Mkpa, the narrative is shifting. Through awareness, compassion, and timely intervention by Breakthrough ACTION-Nigeria, the community is awakening to the power of change within themselves. Blessing's story is not just about one child's triumph over TB; it symbolizes the dawn of a healthier, more informed Ikot Effanga Mkpa community. The seeds of transformation have been sown, and as the community stands united against TB, the promise of a brighter, healthier future takes root.

This success story is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Breakthrough ACTION and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.