

① A Ray of hope is dawning.

I felt deeply touched as I sat besides her holding her hand. Matha's tears rolled down her cheeks.

As I was giving her, her handkerchief she muttered "I am afraid." She paused then she continued "I feel ashamed. The fear of being rejected by the society is so great that I feel the disease I contracted is less painful; Tuberculosis."

Matha is currently admitted in the hospital. She is weak, but getting better each day. I have often sensed the feeling of despair among the patients suffering from T.B. (tuberculosis).

Like Matha most patients especially those in their early twenties and late thirties have their dreams shattered. T.B leaves them weak^{so} that they are forced either to change their jobs or to resign. It can be difficult for them to pursue their profession. Recently a twenty nine year old teacher asked to retire on medical grounds. because he is getting blind. Not only did he contract T.B but he has also suffered from other diseases like meningitis. T.B can be AIDS related. People in my society are well able to relate T.B with AIDS.

AIDS has a stigma still attached to it though people are gradually beginning to accept and to understand. It is due to the

② Increase in numbers of people infected and affected by T.B. The socio-economic decline has contributed to the spread of T.B. People are beginning to be more sympathetic than they used to be. The desire to help their family and relatives is increasing in these times of difficulties.

The high inflation rate, drought, and unemployment rate is on the increase where only 30% Zimbabweans are employed, has made life for an ordinary Zimbabwean very difficult. People in Murambinda where I am currently working are also greatly affected by it.

Murambinda mission hospital is situated in Manicaland area. It is one of the poorest area which is drought stricken. The hospital can only afford three meals a days. The T.B patients on treatment has huge appetite. Only a few patients can afford in between meals who have relatives who are able to buy them extra food. Diet is an essential part of their treatment. It is hard enough for the relatives who have to walk ten or more kilometres to come and see their relatives in hospital because they can't afford transport costs. The weather can be so hot that I feel sorry for the relatives who have to walk

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Such long distances. I also feel sympathetic for the patients who are not very ill since they are sent back home to be taken care of at the nearest clinic and often home DOTS (Direct observation treatment) where the relatives are responsible for making sure that the T.B. patients has taken his/her drugs. I hope one day the influx will be the story of the past since T.B. can be cured. The hospital can only accommodate those who are very ill because of the increase of numbers of the T.B. patients.

The family is exposed to contracting T.B. once the patient who is suffering from T.B. goes home even though the risk is not so high when they start to take T.B. drugs. A seventy eight old year widow looked at me smiling. I wondered why? She is suffering from T.B. and she contracted it from her daughter who had just passed away because of it. Her five sons died with AIDS she told me. "She said to me "Thanks to the Doctors and the nurses who show so much care, concern and love towards all of us here. they do not wear gloves unnecessarily and they come close and touch us. I feel I am human because you are whom you are touch."

I stepped out of the ward feeling the springs of joy and hope welling up inside me. I met

Tom who was once admitted in the hospital coming towards me with a big smile. He told me he had come for review. He lost his job as he was working in the mine, now he is happy as a vendor.

Despite the plight of people with T.B. who are also greatly affected by hunger, economic hardships, I have a dream that T.B. will be completely wiped away. The Shona proverb says "A single thumb cannot kill a lice" meaning that alone we cannot conquer. I believe that a ray of hope is dawning. It is knocking at the doors of our providence.

Please Note: The names I have used are not the real names of the patients.

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