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Tanzania Care: a partnership that brings hope

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Two years ago, the Government of Tanzania in collaboration with the U.S-based, Abbott Fund and other partners, pioneered an initiative dubbed Tanzania Care, geared to modernize country's public health care facilities and systems.

Essentially, the program was aimed at improving services and access to care for people living with HIV/Aids and other serious illnesses.

Axios, an organization dedicated to improving health care in developing countries is among key partners in the Tanzania Care initiative and is serving as implementing partner for the program.

Abbott, the core financier of the scheme has, since the program came into effect in 2002, invested resources amounting to over US \$ 16 million.

Abbott President, Cathy Babington, jots down key components of the project including building a modern, three-storey outpatient treatment centre at Muhimbili National Hospital in Dar es Salaam.

The Abbott boss informs: "The new building will house 26 patient examination rooms, a pharmacy and a training facility for health care professionals."

When open next January, she says, the facility would receive over 500 patients daily.

Babington mentions another component of the program, as renovating and equipping a state-of-the-art hospital laboratory and training laboratory technicians.

"The new laboratory at Muhimbili Hospital will be fully automated, resulting in increased speed and capacity of testing for HIV, hepatitis, cholesterol, glucose and many other diseases," says the President.

According to Babington, under the program staff of the hospital will be trained in HIV care and treatment. She notes: "To date, more than 250 physicians, nurses and support staff have been trained on the latest approaches to HIV care."

Tanzania Care also intends to increase access to HIV testing throughout the country.

"Voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) services are being introduced at 77 locations ranging from regional hospitals to dispensaries in remote areas, key activities include

upgrading facilities, providing HIV testing kits, and training staff on appropriate counselling and testing,” notes the Abbott President.

In the main, Babington says, Tanzania Care intends to strengthening health care management, administration and systems in the country.

She reveals: “Information technology, hospital administration, waste management, security and many other functions are being upgraded within Muhimbili hospital.”

The program is specifically designed to directly address the need to build a sustainable and modern health care infrastructure that enhances HIV/Aids care, an issue that is a challenge for nearly all countries in Africa.

In its essence: “The overarching goal of the program is to create a public/private model that can be adapted by other governments, companies and organizations working to fight AIDS in the developing world,” summarizes the Abbott boss.

In support of the Tanzania Care move, the U.S Health and Human Services Secretary, Tommy Thompson, re-affirmed mid-last week, Washington’s commitment to support HIV/Aids care in Tanzania.

The Secretary’s word of promise comes at a time when Tanzania recently received an additional US \$ 49 million to contribute to a total of US \$ 65 million that will be spent in the country this year from President Bush’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Secretary Thompson made the assurance during a brief tour at the Muhimbili National Hospital in Dar es Salaam last Tuesday to get a first-hand view of the comprehensive health care management and infrastructure improvement initiative.

Secretary Thompson, who was in the country to chair the Global Fund on Tuberculosis, HIV/Aids and Malaria meeting in Arusha says: “Under President Bush’s leadership, the United States is investing unprecedented time, energy and resources to the fight against AIDS,”

The U.S top health and human services in-charge, is pleased with the progress of implementation of the Tanzania Care initiative.

Emphasizing the importance of the partnership, Secretary Thompson says: “This crisis is far too great for any one government to solve, and we need the help of the American business community.”

He also applauds Abbott for innovative partnership with Dar es Salaam that was helping to provide modern hospitals and laboratories, trained medicine doctors and nurses, and effective health care administration to the people all over the continent of Africa.

Commenting on the initiative, Health Minister, Anna Abdallah, says that since the

country is currently especially strained by the HIV/Aids pandemic, Tanzania Care is a timely scheme that brings hope that once was lost in despair.

“The modernization of Muhimbili National Hospital and health centres throughout the country will allow us provide better care for Tanzanians living with HIV/Aids and other serious illnesses,” says Minister Abdallah.

“Through shared expertise, resources and commitment to fighting HIV/Aids, the Government’s partnership with Abbott is already making a difference,” she adds.

Abbott boss, Babington, describes Secretary Thompson as “tireless advocate for public-private partnerships in the fight against HIV/Aids.”

“Working in close partnership with the Government of Tanzania, in two years we have implemented a targeted and effective approach that has already resulted in great access to testing and counseling for patients as well as training for health care professionals,” she adds.

* SOURCE: Sunday Observer