

# Background Sheet One

## The TB/HIV link

All advances in the treatment of HIV and TB to date have the potential to be undermined, or worse, reversed, by the widespread failure to respond to the dual TB/HIV co-epidemic in a coordinated and integrated way. Despite the link between HIV and TB being almost universally acknowledged, TB and HIV programmes remain overwhelmingly independent of one another, an oversight that continues to cost countless lives.

- There are between **12 and 15 million people co-infected with TB and HIV** - almost a third of all people living with HIV.
- In parts of sub-Saharan Africa, up to 70% of TB patients are co-infected with HIV.
- Up to one-third of all AIDS deaths worldwide can be directly attributed to TB

### Why is the TB/HIV combination so deadly?

HIV/AIDS significantly weakens the immune system. This allows opportunistic diseases, such as TB to develop when under normal conditions a person's natural immune system would be sufficient to keep the disease at bay.

An HIV-negative person with a latent TB infection has a 10% chance of progressing to active TB over their *lifetime*; conversely an HIV-positive person has a 10% chance of developing active TB *each year*

Once the TB infection takes hold the body's weakened defence system simply cannot cope and death can ensue within weeks if left untreated.

However, if TB is diagnosed at an early stage, a TB/HIV co-infected patient can be given a life saving regimen of drugs that can extend their lives by several years. The addition of the antibiotic Cotrimoxazole in an infected person's drug regimen, for example, can reduce mortality by up to 40%

TB and HIV continue to fuel each other, creating a devastating cycle of unnecessary suffering and death.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, TB incidence has risen dramatically due to the high levels of HIV, especially where HIV prevalence is greater than 5%.

Between 1990 and 2005, TB incidence rates increased by an average of 7% in countries with HIV prevalence greater than 5% compared to a growth rate of only 1.3% per annum in countries with lower HIV prevalence.

TB is also having an adverse affect on the HIV/AIDS epidemic as it continues to undermine progress in the fight against AIDS by increasing mortality rates amongst people with HIV and further complicating treatment procedures.

***An urgent, coordinated response is needed to prevent to stem the tide of the TB/HIV co-epidemics and to prevent further avoidable deaths throughout the world.***