

Esther Oji: TB Survivor Becomes TB Advocate in Nigeria



When a village health worker first met Esther Oji, she was at a point of near death. This 38-year old woman from rural Nigeria was abandoned to die by her family and lived alone in a dilapidated building. She suffered from lack of food and medication, as she was weak and had no means of transportation.

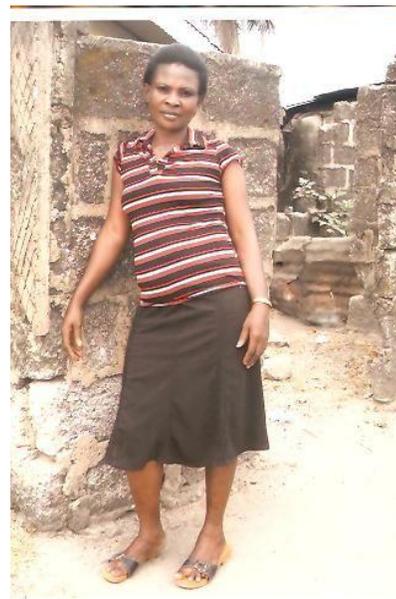
Without accessible health care, Esther's illness progressed and became life threatening. Thanks to the health worker trained by the Grassroots Development & Empowerment (GRADE) Foundation who referred her to the National TB Programme, Esther was tested for TB and immediately started her TB treatment.

GRADE Foundation made arrangements with the local NTP supervisor to ensure a steady delivery of drugs to her. Esther also received occasional food donations from kind neighbors.

Fully recovered and thriving, Esther now raises awareness in her community as living proof that TB is curable and treatment is available. Esther is a living testimony that has convinced the people beyond any doubt that testing for TB and adhering to treatment makes TB patients well and healthy again to live their normal lives.

Unfortunately, Esther was one of many TB patients who could go undetected and unreported. Thousands of rural Nigerians are still dying due to lack of awareness on TB and unavailability of easily accessible health care.

Stigma is still attached to many of those in Esther's position. In addition, Esther's recovery and healthy looks (once again) poses an important question in the minds of her neighbors and feeling of inner guilt and deep regret to those who abandoned her at the peak of her TB illness. So, reduction of stigma and discrimination against people living with TB and/or HIV/AIDS becomes easy to achieve. People around Esther now know that people who find themselves in Esther's situation should be cared for and shown love.



GRADE Foundation is grass-root non-government organization helping people to learn more about TB particularly in four communities in Afikpo South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Supported through the Village-based Health Volunteers with the CFCS grant from Stop TB Partnership, GRADE Foundation trained Village-based Health Volunteers to monitor treatment of each TB patient to ensure adherence to TB treatment, provided support to TB and/or HIV/AIDS patients and communities in overcoming TB-related stigma and advocated to

make TB management accessible to the rural people by introducing them to the local National TB Programme (NTP) supervisor and to the DOTS centers closest to them for easy access.