

Mtwara Dispensary, South Tanzania

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Toto Ndege Bwire Kusaga, M.B.A. (CM), (Mzumbe University), serves as the president of Central Tanzania Field of the Southern Tanzania Union Mission. Previously he served as the executive secretary of South East Tanzania Conference, departmental director in Eastern Tanzania Conference for ten years, and a frontline pastor for twelve years.

Mtwara Seventh-day Adventist Dispensary is a Seventh-day Adventist medical institution which was established in 1978. It is located in Mtwara region, in Mtwara-Mikindani municipality, in the center of the town, and it shares a compound with Mtwara Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is currently operated by South East Tanzania Conference which comprises the southeastern part of the former Tanzania General Field.

Founding of the Dispensary

In the mid-1960s, Tanzania General Field, under the leadership of Pastor Rudi Henning as president and Reuben Ngasani as secretary/treasurer, initiated some strategies to reach the areas of Mtwara, Lindi, Masasi, and Nachingwea with the gospel. The leaders first purchased a house in Lindi for the missionary's accommodation. Pastor David Dobias was appointed to implement the outreach strategies in the selected areas. With new ideas and vision, he recruited several laymen and provided them with bicycles to facilitate their work of visiting house to house and spreading the gospel in those areas.¹

Early in his work, Pastor Dobias learned that medical work was the right arm of the gospel and that a health facility was necessary to complement his house-to-house outreach. It became obvious that there was a great need for quality health services in the local community. In 1971 he constructed a dispensary in Mtwara town. The same year, the Tanzania General Field, in its yearend committee meeting, took an action to send Dr. Ellison T. Mujungu to Mtwara to lead the newly established dispensary. Unfortunately, the plan was aborted because the regional medical officer did not allow the church to open a dispensary. In 1978 Dr. Mhina was transferred from Temeke Dispensary and assigned to resume the dispensary construction work.²

Generally speaking, from the 1960s to 1980s, the Adventist outreach activities in Tanzania were complemented by the medical work. In every place where the Adventists started gospel outreach activities, they also started a dispensary to heal the sick.³ Mtwara is part of the southern coast region where Muslims are the majority, making acceptance of Adventism in the area very difficult, and medical work was seen to be the best entering wedge.

Growth of the Dispensary

After it was established in 1978, the dispensary continued to work as a missionary center, providing health services to the communities in and outside of Mtwara town. Under the Health Act number 26 of 1997⁴; the Tanzanian government allowed private dispensaries to give medical treatment to people.⁵ Thus Mtwara Dispensary was registered as a private health facility and granted registration number 094006 on October 6, 1997.

At the time of its establishment, the facility was operated by four staff members. It had one clinician, Dr. Mhina, as the director; one registered nurse, Mary Mbemba; Lucy Umila as registrar and cashier; and Daniel Samatoto, as laboratory assistant.⁶ The facility began with one simple building and provided only out-patient and laboratory services. The laboratory services were limited to a blood smear for malaria parasites, routine urine microscopy, and stool microscopy.⁷ Today the staff has increased, the services have expanded, and there are now two buildings.

Phases of Growth and Expansion of the Dispensary

While services to the community commenced in 1978, real growth and expansion of Mtwara Dispensary can be divided into three phases, as follows:

Phase I (1991-2004)

From 1991 to 2004 the facility went through changes to expand its services in order to maximize its potential. The expansion was initiated by Dr. Ndaro Esaba who was director of the facility and his assistant Clifford Majani. The services which were added included reproductive and child health services, outpatient services, and additional laboratory services. The facility also began to provide services to insured clients. At that time, the accepted insurances were National Bank of Commerce, Tanzania Electric Supply Company Limited, National Social Security Fund, British Petroleum (a fuel supply company), National Microfinance Bank, Cashew Nut Improvement Program, Air Tanzania, Tanzania Housing Bank, and Tanzania Revenue Authority.⁸

Phase II (2005-2012)

During this period the facility began to offer postnatal care and prevention from mother to child treatment, care and treatment clinic, voluntary counseling and testing, family planning, pharmaceutical services, and minor surgical services.⁹ The wide range of services led to the increase of facility staff as follows: two clinical officers, one assistant clinical officer, one enrolled nurse/matron, one laboratory assistant, one laboratory attendant, two assistant nurses, one security guard, one registrar, one cashier/accountant, one clerk, and two janitors.¹⁰ With these staff additions, the number of patients attended to daily increased to an average of 40, or 1,200 patients per month.¹¹

Phase III (2013-2019)

This is the current phase. The facility now offers services in the areas of out-patient department, sexually transmitted diseases treatment, gender based violence counseling, violence against children counseling, birth certificate registration, laboratory (including all dispensary basic investigations), reproductive and child care, antenatal care, postnatal care, prevention from mother to child treatment, care and treatment clinic, voluntary counseling and testing, practitioner initiated testing and counseling, family planning, pharmaceutical services, minor surgical services, and radiology (ultrasound imaging).¹²

Collaboration

The facility collaborates with other health service providers for better service delivery to the community. They include the government of Tanzania through the ministry of health, community development, gender, elderly, and children, and USAID through the Boresha Afya Programmes.¹³

Historical Role of Mtwara Dispensary

As an entity of the church, the institution has been involved in various evangelistic activities since it was established. This is due to the fact that medical missionary work is the right arm of the gospel message which must be proclaimed to a fallen world. In 2016 the church came up with the campaign of Total Member Involvement, which led the facility to run a two-week evangelistic meeting with all medical missionary workers in Mtwara region at Pacha ya Mbae Street, Kilolo county. Through this campaign, many people heard of the soon coming of Jesus Christ. This is a role the dispensary has played effectively over the years in collaboration with other medical missionary programs in Tanzania, Tanzania Universities and Colleges Adventist Students Association, and the local church. The facility uses television to show special evangelistic meetings such as Ushindi Hatimaye (February 2016), Maisha Hatimaye (February 2017), and Nyumbani Hatimaye (February 2018), whereby patients were given the opportunity to watch and listen to various spiritual programs.¹⁴

Evangelism Outlook

Since its inception in 1978, the Mtwara Dispensary has begun every morning with a session of prayer and a short Bible study involving all patients. While the tangible results of this devotional exercise are not readily known, the seeds of the Word of God are sown and they cannot go without making an impact on the hearers. The dispensary has provided opportunity for many people to visit the Adventist Church premises, since the church and dispensary are in the same compound. Given the location of the dispensary in the municipality, Mtwara Dispensary needs to become a hospital, so its influence will be enhanced and it will better fulfill the Church's mission.

List of Directors

Dr. Mhina (1978); Dr. Jasson Milambi, Dr. Nasari, Dr. Hassan Teminyanga, Dr. Moris Nanjombi, Dr. Ally Teminyanga (1979-1989);¹⁵ Dr. Ndaró Esaba (1990-1993); Dr. Clifford Majani (1993-2000); Dr. Dani Matekere (2000-2001); Dr. Tecla Shengena (2001); Dr. Clifford Majani (2002-2005); Dr. Masonyi (2005-2007); Dr. Batret Bakari (2008-2012); Dr. Maroa C. Kiiya (2012-2018); and Dr. Ng'oha R. Kingamkono (2018-present).

SOURCES

Livingstone L. Kingu, *Changamoto za Tiba*, 2013. Unpublished manuscript. Author's private library.

Mtwara Seventh-day Adventist Dispensary proceedings. Mtwara Seventh-day Adventist Dispensary Archives. Mtwara, Tanzania.

Mwashinga, Christopher R. *Utume na Ukristo katika Afrika Mashariki*. Berrien Springs, MI: Maximum Hope Books, 2013.

NOTES

1. Dr. Ellison Mujungu, email message to author, April 7, 2019.
2. Ibid.
3. Christopher R. Mwashinga, *Utume na Ukristo katika Afrika Mashariki* (Berrien Springs, MI: Maximum Hope Books, 2013), 174.
4. Livingstone L. Kingu, *Changamoto za Tiba*, 2013, unpublished manuscript. Author's private library.
5. Ibid.
6. Mtwara Seventh-day Adventist Dispensary proceedings. Mtwara Seventh-day Adventist Dispensary Archives, Mtwara, Tanzania.
7. Ibid.
8. Dr. Clifford Majani, email message to author, April 1, 2019.
9. Alfred Chimika, phone interview by author, March 25, 2019.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

12. Dr. Watson Mwaibasa, phone interview by author, April 2, 2019.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. No written records could be found to assign a specific period to each of the six doctors in charge from 1979-1989.

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