

# The Global Fund takes to the stage to raise tuberculosis awareness

A township musical theatre group from South Africa has teamed with the Global Fund to spread the word about TB control to the world

In 2012 the Global Fund is celebrating 10 years of impact in fighting AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria. Working with its many partners, the Global Fund has contributed to dramatic gains in health and development over the past decade, bringing treatment for AIDS, TB, and malaria to millions of people in poor countries, who otherwise would have died. As a result, affected countries and communities have gone from a state of despair and hopelessness to fighting the spread of the diseases and alleviating suffering.

The Global Fund currently supports AIDS, TB, and malaria programmes in 10 countries in Southern Africa, the region which remains the global epicentre of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Out of the total number of people living with HIV worldwide in 2009, 34% resided in 10 countries in Southern Africa (UNAIDS), and high rates of TB and malaria also exist in the region, where the three diseases are taking a tremendous toll on health systems.

## The Global Fund and tuberculosis

Tuberculosis is one of the major diseases faced by many countries around the world with over 900 000 new cases identified in 2011. The Global Fund, in collaboration with its partners across the globe, continues to play a major role in the fight against this disease. At the end of 2011, US\$3.8 billion or 17% of Global Fund funding was allocated to TB-related programmes. This provides anti-TB treatment to around 8.6 million people and equates to 79% of all international funding for programmes combating this disease.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the picture is worrying, with 590 000 new cases of TB identified in 2011, on top of the 2.8 million people already benefiting from TB/HIV services. South Africa is third on the World Health Organization (WHO) list of the world's highest TB burden countries, with 490 000 new cases detected in 2010 and some 25 000 people dying of the disease in 2010.

The Global Fund has been a partner of the Republic of South Africa since 2002 and has signed a total of 12 grants with South Africa, three of which are Single Stream Fund (SSF) grants. Five HIV/AIDS grants are



MC\_0670: Somalia © The Global Fund / Didier Ruef

*Providing TB treatment from birth to old age. Above, a mother has her child's lungs checked at a TB hospital in Somalia; below, a community health worker in South Sudan inspects a lady who is a suspected case of TB*



MC\_2288: South Sudan © The Global Fund/John Rief

currently active and, to date, US\$ 261 545 213 has been disbursed. Continuing its partnership with South Africa, although in a new and innovative way, the Global Fund and Isango Ensemble – an internationally renowned South African theatre company based in Cape Town – have entered into a new and unique partnership to promote greater international awareness and action in fighting TB in South Africa and around the world.

## The Global Fund and South Africa's Isango Ensemble – fighting tuberculosis together

Drawn from townships across South Africa, Isango's cast have packed theatres around the world with their multi-award-winning and distinctly African re-workings of musical masterpieces such as *Carmen* and *The Magic*

This article has been written by the Communications Department at the Global Fund headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland

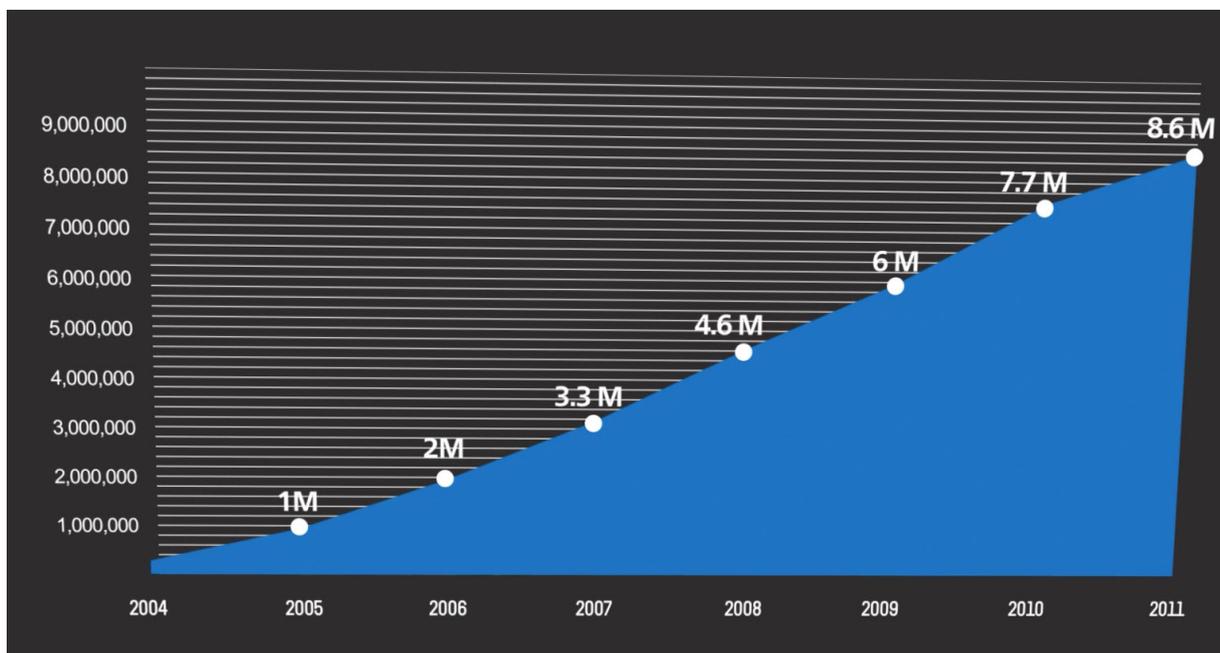


Figure 1 Cases of TB treated from 2004–2011

*Flute.* The innovative partnership with the Global Fund began with a world premiere of a startling new adaptation of Puccini's classic opera *La Bohème* in Cape Town on 23 February, 2012.

The aim is that Isango's re-imagining of Puccini's classic can both be a musical triumph as well as help to attract attention to the global threat of TB. Just like 1830s Paris, every year in contemporary South Africa hundreds of thousands of people contract and struggle with TB, the disease that kills Mimi, the heroine of *La Bohème*.

Isango's interpretation of *La Bohème* moves the setting from the garrets of Paris in the first half of the 19th century to a contemporary African township. It retains all the musical brilliance of Puccini's most popular opera but brings new meaning and relevance to the work, given that TB continues to devastate communities in the townships and across the country.

As with all of Isango's work, all of the nature and heart of the original is kept intact, but the whole work is seen through a South African prism. The townships where the performers are drawn from are amongst some of the world's highest infection areas for TB and indeed, in the company's extended families and friends many are living with the realities of this disease on a daily basis. So for Isango, *La Bohème* is not a glittering piece of musical history but a searing emotional cry for understanding and action.

Isango's *La Bohème* is a timely reminder that TB is not a disease of the past but very much a modern day reality that continues to devastate much of the developing world, causing widespread suffering and death. TB still takes the lives of three people every minute. In 2010, there were almost one and a half million deaths from TB, making it the second largest cause of death from an infectious disease worldwide.

Being the main international financier of TB programmes around the world, the Global Fund hopes to work with Isango on promoting its *La Bohème* and its social messages to audiences worldwide. In the decade since the Global Fund was created its support has financed the detection and treatment of 8.6 million new cases of infectious TB.

### International performances

The world premiere took place on the 23 February 2012 in Cape Town, and the Global Fund is delighted that Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, a TB survivor and Chair of the Desmond Tutu TB Centre, joined them and Isango in co-hosting this world premiere and Special Gala Performance.

Following the South African premiere, *La Bohème* will transfer to the Hackney Empire theatre in London in May 2012 at the start of an international tour, with subsequent performances at venues in several European cities. The Global Fund intends to use events around these international performances of Isango's *La Bohème* – *Abanxaxhi* to show that TB is not a disease of the past but a contemporary reality that causes widespread suffering and death across large swathes of the planet.

The international performances of *La Bohème* are intended to raise awareness of TB – a major problem even in donor countries – among governments and international decision-makers. While recognising the progress made to date, the goal is to encourage the political will and the continued funding to ensure that progress made over the past 10 years is continued and strengthened as the Global Fund, together with its partners, faces a second decade in the fight against this killer disease.

More information about the Global Fund–Isango Ensemble partnership is available at <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/laboheme/>.