

Media Fact Sheet: The Leprosy Mission Trust India (TLMTI)

April 2012

The Organisation

The Leprosy Mission (TLM), founded in 1874, is the oldest and largest leprosy-focused International Non-Governmental Organization in the world, working among individuals and communities disadvantaged due to leprosy, empowering them to live with dignity, and be included in the development process.

The Leprosy Mission Trust India (TLMTI), a member country of TLM, is registered as a charitable organization under Societies Registration Act, 1860. TLMTI has evolved from a purely medical organization involved in service delivery to a medico-social organization focusing not only on health care but also on community development, empowerment, awareness, advocacy, sustainable livelihoods and rights-based issues.

The effects of leprosy are devastating and far reaching. TLMTI is committed to restore human dignity, self reliance and quality of life for people affected by leprosy. TLMTI constantly endeavours to empower people affected by leprosy not just by providing a cure, but by addressing the underlying causes, working to prevent disability and by helping people and communities affected by leprosy to be equal members in society by providing appropriate medical, rehabilitative, educational and other services to meet their many needs.

Current Programmes

TLMTI, with its vast service delivery network, is rendering its services to people affected by leprosy, in 8 states, through various programmes. They are:

Hospitals: We provide health care through 14 hospitals. In addition to tertiary leprosy care, we provide General Surgery, Plastic & Reconstructive Surgeries, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, general clinical services in Dermatology, Ophthalmology, Internal Medicine, Podiatry, and Obstetrics & Gynecology.

Community Interventions: We aim to empower people affected by leprosy and the communities they live in, through 12 community-based projects. Through these programmes, we advocate and promote the rights of people affected by leprosy and their family members, for their full and equal participation in society, including, right to equal justice, equal opportunity, and equal dignity, without discrimination. We engage with relevant government departments and like-minded NGOs on leprosy awareness, repealing discriminatory laws and ending social stigma.

Vocational Training Centres (VTCs): We actively contribute to the social and economic development of the communities in which we implement programmes, to build sustainable livelihood through 6 VTCs. They support comprehensive vocational and employability training interventions, including life skills, career exploration, communication and computer skills to youth from leprosy-affected families.

Snehalayas (Old Age Homes): *Snehalayas* or Old Age Homes are for elderly leprosy-affected people, usually with multiple disabilities, who have no families or caregivers. We provide them shelter, food, clothing and medical care, through 5 *Snehalayas*.

Media Centre: The Diana, Princess of Wales Health Education Centre (Media Centre) was established in Noida, in Uttar Pradesh, in 1999, with the aim of being a resource centre for media advocacy. The activities include developing programmes and activities related to leprosy and general health education, together with promoting the work among people affected by leprosy. The centre has well-equipped audio and video studios that conceptualize and develop programmes on leprosy and other diseases, to bring about awareness.

Research: Research in TLMTI is a major activity and is coordinated through the Research Resource Centre (RRC). The RRC was established in 2000, to enable research as a way of solving pertinent problems and improving the quality of life of people affected by leprosy. Various research activities currently undertaken include clinical trials, social science research, epidemiological research and lab-based research done through the Stanley Brown Laboratory. More than 100 papers were presented in the last International Leprosy Congress, held in 2008. Stanley Brown Laboratory, the research hub of TLMTI, which is located in Delhi, is well-equipped and is currently involved in research relating to diagnosis and transmission of leprosy. The lab is recognized by WHO as a referral centre for sentinel surveillance for drug resistance in leprosy.

Collaborative Working with other Organisations: Acknowledging that we need to work with shared goals and mutual accountability alongside government and other civil society organizations, we share our skills and resources to enhance our own impact and those of our partners in order to achieve our vision of transforming communities to overcome leprosy.

TLMTI's partners include Government of India, state governments, members of International Federation of Anti-leprosy Organizations (ILEP), World Health Organization (WHO), CBM International, various Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and leprosy-affected peoples' organizations.

What is Leprosy?

Leprosy, (also known as Hansen's disease), is a chronic, infectious disease affecting the skin and peripheral nerves of infected individuals. It is caused by a bacillus (a rod-shaped bacterium), *Mycobacterium leprae*. The first sign of leprosy is often a patch of skin that is lighter in colour than the surrounding skin, with loss of sensation in the area of the patch.

In untreated cases of leprosy, nerve damage and other complications occur as the disease progresses. The numbness and loss of sensation due to nerve damage often leads to neglected injuries progressing to infected ulcers on the hands and feet, and then to the typical deformities of the face and limbs. In many communities, this leads to stigma towards those affected and their family members, causing them to be excluded from the society. They are banned from attending family get-togethers, events and social and religious functions.

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