



Early detection of leprosy and prevention of disabilities

MAHARASHTRA, India

In the state of Maharashtra, FAIRMED is strengthening the local health system with its project «Early detection of leprosy and prevention of disabilities.» The project in the rural areas of Dhule and Jalgaon aims to improve quality of life and reduce discrimination against people living with leprosy. Thereby, the early detection of leprosy to prevent permanent disability is of central importance.

Background

Every year, more than 200,000 people worldwide are newly diagnosed with leprosy, and more than 60 percent of these are in India. The state of Maharashtra alone is responsible for around 14 percent of all leprosy cases in India, with the districts of Dhule and Jalgaon the hardest hit.

FAIRMED is committed to ensuring that people affected by the disease can lead as healthy lives as possible. It is a sad truth that those suffering from leprosy usually suffer twice over, as the disease can lead to permanent disability if left untreated. Moreover, people with visible signs of illness are frequently shunned and discriminated against. It is thus vital that those affected are treated in a timely manner.

The project

In cooperation with the Indian organisation ALERT-INDIA, FAIRMED is committed to preventing the spread of leprosy in the districts of Dhule and Jalgaon. The core of the project is the early detection of leprosy in order to prevent irreversible disabilities. With assistance from Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and volunteers who themselves have been leprosy patients, people with leprosy are visited and advised to seek out treatment on an independent basis. At the same time, efforts are made to reduce the prejudices and fears on the side of the general population with regard to leprosy, so that members of the community affected by the disease undergo as little discrimination as possible. In addition, training helps to improve the skills of health workers. Finally, people with disabilities are supported in the application process for an officially recognised disability card, which permits them access to social benefits.

Objectives and activities

The project in the rural areas of Dhule and Jalgaon aims to improve quality of life and reduce discrimination against people living with leprosy. In order to achieve this overall objective, the project pursues the following specific objectives, which are, amongst others, pursued through the activities listed below:

Support for early detection programs to reduce leprosy-related disabilities

- Organisation of trainings for health professionals in the early detection of leprosy
- Organisation of active case finding through door-to-door checks
- Intensive awareness-raising activities to help people affected by leprosy to seek out treatment on an independent basis

Leprosy treatment and prevention of leprosy-related disabilities

- Organisation of training for health centre personnel to improve expertise in the areas of leprosy diagnosis and treatment
- Organisation of workshops for basic health centre personnel on the prevention of disabilities
- Expansion of existing leprosy reference centres within sub-district hospitals with medical equipment and medicines

Reducing discrimination against people affected by leprosy and strengthening of rights

- Organisational strengthening for people affected by leprosy through knowledge-building of their rights and how these can be claimed
- Mobilisation of leprosy-affected people who are politically involved as representatives in disability organisations

Monitoring

- In cooperation with ALERT-INDIA, the FAIRMED project team in the Delhi country office safeguards the implementation of activities and produces regular reports, as well as a half-yearly progress report including financial statement. The project is also accompanied by regular monitoring visits by employees of the FAIRMED country office and by local official agencies and government bodies. Thanks to consistent monitoring and the engagement of the affected communities, problems at all levels can be identified in a timely manner, causes can be analysed and, where required, methods and objectives can be adapted. Throughout, the following indicators are used to measure the progress of the project:

- The effectiveness of disability reduction programs is measured by the rate of people with leprosy-related disabilities who do not experience a worsening of the disability.
- Simplification of access to healthcare services for leprosy patients is measured by utilisation rate and the number and use of state-provided services.
- The effectiveness of efforts to strengthen the rights of people with leprosy is measured by the number of social benefits received and the number of representatives in the respective interest groups.

Sustainability

In a climate of mutual learning and respect, FAIRMED works exclusively with local employees and the participation of local authorities, government and partner organisations. This fosters broad acceptance, and once the project is completed, enables the respective authorities to assume responsibility for the continuation of activities. The presented project is working towards sustainability through the following measures:

- Fostering of self-initiative and the participation of leprosy sufferers. These are the foundations of community engagement in the fight against leprosy, both among the beneficiaries and on the side of authorities.
- Training and development for local health workers and accredited social health activists (ASHAs), which facilitates independent, local expertise.

Beneficiaries

The project is providing direct assistance to around 10,000 people affected by leprosy or leprosy-related disabilities. The families of those affected as well as the general population (around 300,000 people) also benefit indirectly through improved health centre facilities and the training provided for professional health workers.

Budget

The total budget for the project period 2017 to 2019 is CHF 319,565.



Pintu's Story

Discovered thanks to an ASHA

Pintu Namdeo Bhil was working in a brick factory in Navi Mumbai when he first noticed the symptoms of a disease. Because he did not know the cause of his illness, he travelled back to his home village to seek assistance. The district health volunteer – an ASHA – immediately diagnosed Pintu with the neglected tropical disease leprosy. Pintu took medication for six months. The ASHA visited Pintu regularly, examining him and his family for signs of leprosy and providing the appropriate medicines. Thanks to the ASHA, Pintu did not suffer any permanent physical deformities.

«Fortunately, the leprosy was recognised in time and I can continue to support my family.»



Our heartfelt thanks for your interest in our work. Since 1959, the Swiss development organisation FAIRMED has been committed to improving the health of people affected by poverty in Africa and Asia. Thanks to the support of our loyal donors, donations from foundations, as well as inheritances and bequests, FAIRMED is able to offer the very poorest a path to basic healthcare.

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