

but it really is a very significant and steady process. I think we should be able to accelerate it a bit. But I do know that we have a saying: “When the pot is boiling, you don’t need to heat it a lot.”

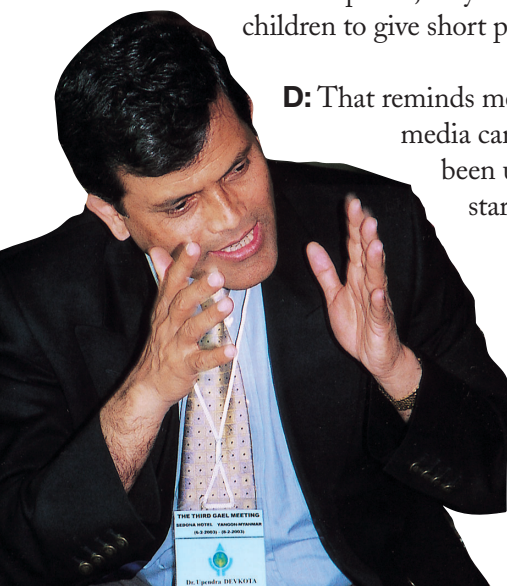
Our education program is very well planned and the mass media campaign is very regular. Every day, people see the television and come to the health centers, knowing that leprosy is curable. The message is very clear. The Nepalese believe that you are reborn 8.4 million times. In the past, they said that if you did something very sinful in a past life, you would be born with leprosy. But today, that is thought of as nothing but a story. This is a very positive change in terms of cultural education. We will, however, definitely intensify our efforts. We will do case detection campaigns targeted especially at bad areas, and our regular case detection programs need a bit of focus, but we should be able to handle that. I would like to invite you to see some of the areas where leprosy is still endemic. The deformity rate is gradually decreasing. Surgeons in leproseria are highly qualified and even non-leprosy patients are seeking their treatment as well, as they do not mind entering those facilities. Leprosy patients don’t mind being called leprosy patients. So in other words, it is not a problem.

**S:** Wonderful. Looking at the high endemic figures of the past, we can see that what you have accomplished is significant. But the final mile in a 100-mile journey is most difficult.

**D:** One thing I would like to add is that for the leprosy elimination campaign, we need to translate things into local languages. Messages are very effective in mass education if they are translated into local languages.

**S:** If we look at the Indian and Mozambique examples, they have the same kind of language issues. Even if you do campaigns through TV and newspapers, they may not effectively reach the local people as we want them to. In these places, they have been using school children to give short plays or sing songs.

**D:** That reminds me of our own mass media campaign. We have been using a very popular star to sing songs on TV.



**S:** That’s an excellent idea. Now, if I may change the topic, some people say that due to political turmoil in your country, it is difficult to make leprosy elimination activities effective. They say that we should wait until order is restored before really trying to work on the leprosy campaign there.

**D:** This is a very ignorant opinion. Today, 90 percent of health institutions are active. Even in the areas controlled by Maoist groups, health activities are continuing. Medical supplies are regularly provided in these areas. In the past, people were concerned that supplying these kind of medicines to the countryside would make the Maoists stronger. But when I became minister, I said that what rebels need are surgeons who can heal wounds, or fix broken bones. These services are today available only in the cities, which the Maoists do not control. Leprosy supplies are not going to make the Maoists any stronger and so why should we stop the supply lines? TB tablets or leprosy tablets or aspirin are not going to make the Maoists any stronger. Now the lines are open.

**S:** NGOs’ involvement is important and in Nepal we understand many NGOs are active. However, we have heard there was a certain period when NGOs were kicked out of the country. What do you think of the future of collaboration with NGOs?

**D:** We work with NGOs to intensify elimination activities. They can carry on as long as they like. But we have got our own mechanisms. I think that in the leprosy sector, we have achieved an excellent symbiosis. It has not been the policy of the government to kick out leprosy-related NGOs. They are not troublemakers. Of course, there are other NGOs creating a lot of trouble. Sometimes with them, we are not sure who is in the driver’s seat — them or the government. Again though, I have nothing but appreciation for what the leprosy NGOs have done.

**S:** In closing, what do you think of this GAEL meeting?

**D:** I think it is helpful. No doubt about it. Extremely helpful to come to a global consensus. One point that I would like to make is that while the sharing of success stories is good, it is sometimes more helpful to share failure stories. You sometimes learn more from the failures of others. In future meetings of GAEL, it will be good if we have a session in which we can listen to failure stories.

**S:** Good point. I’m sure we can all benefit from it. Thank you for talking with us. □