



Country Scene in West Bengal

REPORT FROM INDIA

Pilot Project at School in Uttar Pradesh

By Leena Nandan



Leena Nandan was project director for the National Leprosy Elimination Program, in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 2002-2003. Her previous positions for the Indian Administrative Service include Managing Director for Women's Welfare, UP, where she was responsible for formulating the Women's Empowerment Project. Ms. Nandan has extensive experience in working for rural and urban poor. The following article highlights a successful and practical approach to fighting leprosy.

Amarnath, a bright and alert child, 10 years of age, takes school very seriously. His family belongs to the urban poor strata of society and, although most of his brothers have attended school, they have had to drop out due to economic reasons.

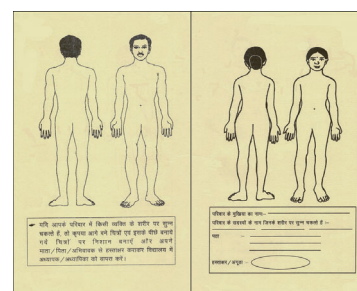
Amarnath is the second-youngest sibling in a family of four boys and one girl. Despite the fact that his second brother was diagnosed with leprosy a few years ago and underwent treatment as a PB (paucibacillary¹) case, their mother did not realize that the telltale patches on her own skin, as well as Amarnath's, were indicative of the fact that they were also MB (multibacillary) leprosy cases. It was only the School IEC²/Diagnostic campaign, launched as a new initiative in the government-run primary schools of urban Lucknow (the capital of UP), which brought these hidden cases to light. When Amarnath was asked why he responded to the IEC card distributed in the school, his simple answer was "Because my teacher asked me to take the card home and show it to my mother." What exactly is this IEC card, and what is this *pilot project*?

Pilot Project Background

Yohei Sasakawa, president of The Nippon Foundation and WHO Special Ambassador for the Elimination of Leprosy, visited Uttar Pradesh (a northern state of India — population 166 million) on December 6th and 7th, 2002. In the course of discussions held at that time, Mr. Sasakawa suggested that since school-children are an invaluable medium for IEC, they could be used even more effectively. In order to attract their interest and make the IEC effective, a new format based on drawings of the human figure could be developed. On the basis of this idea, a school IEC card was designed and printed as a two-page leaflet. On the cover page is a drawing of a male figure and on the reverse, a female figure. Simple instructions have been given on the cover, explaining that if anyone in the family has skin patches lacking sensation, their location should be indicated by sketching a patch on the figure. On the reverse

side of the cover, below the drawing of the female figure, there is space for the name and address of the child, names of people having skin patches and space for the signature/thumbprint of the parent/guardian.

The second page of the card is detachable, and has information on leprosy, namely that it is fully curable, drugs are available at all government health centers free of charge, and so on, written on both sides. The detached part is to be retained by the child, so that he/she can read



1 Leprosy is classified as paucibacillary or multibacillary leprosy based on the number of patches. PB is usually non-infective while MB is infective.
2 IEC — Information, Education and Communication