

ENAELP Makes Its Mark

An association of ex-leprosy patients in Ethiopia goes from strength to strength.

Showing what can be achieved when a group of motivated people organize themselves for a cause they believe in, the Ethiopian National Association of Ex-Leprosy Patients has established itself as a respected and influential body representing the interests of persons affected by leprosy in Ethiopia.

The origins of ENAELP trace back to 1992, when 30 people held a meeting in a field to discuss the decline in leprosy services offered by the ALERT hospital in Addis Ababa. Out of those discussions came the decision to form an association to lobby for the human rights of leprosy-affected persons. Within two years, the concept of a nationwide association had taken shape, and in 1996 ENAELP was officially registered by Ethiopia's justice ministry as an indigenous NGO.

Today ENAELP consists of a national association and 54 branch organizations. It is run by a nine-member executive committee elected by a general assembly composed of two members from each branch. The national association coordinates capacity-building among the branch associations, which are expected to network, lobby and generate their own funds.

In recent years, ENAELP has enjoyed growing success in terms of its advocacy, awareness and empowerment activities. Every year it marks World Leprosy Day, producing brochures and posters, publishing an annual magazine (*The Truth*) and

airing a two-hour radio program. It is a founding member of the Ethiopian Federation of Persons with Disabilities, and with the help of committed partners is engaged in providing educational opportunities, creating income-generating projects and extending revolving loans to persons affected by leprosy and their families.

The advantages of speaking with a collective voice can be seen in the efforts of ENAELP branches: liaising with local authorities to obtain water and electricity for a settlement in Awassa; convincing Habitat for Humanity to allow the participation of leprosy-affected persons in a new housing development in Dessie; and securing greater recognition for leprosy-affected persons in Gulele, a suburb of Addis Ababa.

Some 5,000 people are diagnosed with leprosy each year, 14% of whom are already suffering from disability. They are usually from the poorest sectors of society and even after they are cured, the stigma of leprosy exacerbates their socio-economic plight.

ENAELP's vision is of a society free of poverty and discrimination, where persons affected by leprosy can participate fully in the economic, social and political life of the country. But realizing that vision in one of Africa's poorest countries represents an enormous challenge. In the words of chairperson Birke Nigatu, "Deep-rooted misperceptions about leprosy remain. This is what we are here to fight." ■



(Clockwise from top left) How ENAELP helps: a loan beneficiary stands in front of his clothing stall; a home owner works on his Habitat for Humanity house; a women's group earns a living from embroidery.