

ILEP Looks to the Future

New general secretary takes up post at turning point for the organization

Douglas Soutar became ILEP's new general secretary in September, with a track record of 25 years in overseas development work — the last 10 as LEPROA's programs director.

He joins ILEP at a challenging time in its history, with members increasingly involved in a broad range of health issues as the context of leprosy control in many countries changes.

It is also a time of renewed collaboration with the World Health Organization, marked by the publication earlier this year of WHO's new global strategy, which ILEP has endorsed.

"I think the shift in thinking toward the sustainability of leprosy activities is very positive," said Soutar. "But it will have to be encouraged and developed, which is where ILEP members have a key role to play."

"What we bring to an important new strategic document is a vast range of operational experience," he said. "Our members have lots of people in the field who know what the realities are for patients. For years ahead, there will still be people affected by leprosy and they will need input from ILEP members."



Douglas Soutar: members have "key role to play"

NATIONAL NETWORK IN INDIA

A survey of leprosy colonies is being undertaken across India in preparation for a national forum of leprosy-affected persons scheduled for December in New Delhi.

At the forum, colony representatives and other cured persons will discuss the possibility of forming a national network.

Organizations of recovered persons already exist in a number of Indian states/union territories, but this would be a national network for improving quality of life and facilitating social integration. ■

FROM THE EDITORS

BUILDING RESPECT

On the outskirts of Dessie, a city some 400 kilometers northeast of Addis Ababa, Habitat for Humanity is constructing a community of 150 new homes. A small number of these have been earmarked for persons affected by leprosy — but only after the local branch of the Ethiopian National Association of Ex-Leprosy Patients (see page 5) successfully lobbied Habitat for Humanity to be included.

Housing is the biggest issue facing the leprosy-affected community in Dessie, where some members squat in makeshift accommodation on a hillside, and others occupy a plot of land next to an unkempt graveyard. Yet the initial objective of taking part in the Habitat for Humanity project was not the chance of a proper home but to prove a point.

"There was a perception that leprosy-affected persons are good-for-nothing and would be unable to afford the down payment required or pay back the loan," said Sisay, ENAELP's Dessie branch chairman. "The first goal of participation, therefore, was to 'break the stigma' by showing

that we could."

One of the lucky home-builders is the branch secretary, Liben. He arrived in the area in 1966 to receive treatment for leprosy and has remained ever since. For more than 30 years, he supported himself and his family by begging. But when the Dessie branch of ENAELP was formed in 1995, membership provided him with the incentive to change his life.

"I thought I should set an example and stop begging," he said. "And I didn't want to be seen as a beggar when I represented our association."

Now he rears sheep, which he sells to hotels and restaurants, and it was the sale of a couple of sheep that secured the down payment on his new house.

Making the transition from begging to sheep-rearing took courage but it pleases his children and his friends look at him with new respect.

Like anyone who has taken out a mortgage, he worries about being able to pay it off; but if he wants to set an example and help "break the stigma," there is no better way.

FOR THE ELIMINATION OF LEPROSY

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