



Vocational training at the Green Pastures facility in Pokhara.

around Green Pastures Hospital and Rehabilitation Center, a well-run facility in a lovely location set up in 1957 by the International Nepal Fellowship, a Christian mission. INF focuses on health and development in the West and Mid-West regions of Nepal for poor and marginalized peoples. Leprosy is one of INF's six core areas, among

International, recalled how he had been present a few years earlier when IDEA Nepal was established. "There were just a handful of leprosy-affected persons and some medical staff. What a change!" he said.

For my part, I told the assembled audience that there are two approaches to dealing with the issue of stigma and discrimination — a top-down approach and a bottom-up one. The top-down approach involves initiatives such as issuing last year's Global Appeal signed by world dignitaries, and seeking to have the United Nations issue guidelines to member nations.

The bottom-up approach is a grass-roots effort. Some 135,000 people have been cured of leprosy in Nepal. I urged IDEA to encourage as many of them as possible to become members in order to mobilize support and help the organization grow. While self-help is the key, I also said there will be times when government assistance is required. For that partnership to be effective, the government must be fully informed about the situation of affected persons. Overall, I was very encouraged by what I saw and returned to Kathmandu with the feeling that IDEA Nepal is moving in the right direction.

Leprosy FACTS

Of Nepal's 75 districts, 44 have a leprosy prevalence rate of less than 1 per 10,000 population.

Organized by the WHO's South-East Asian Regional Office, the two-day seminar on leprosy elimination took stock of Nepal's position and the challenges it faces. A major barrier remains the health consequences of poverty. Nonetheless, Nepal is making progress in reaching out to people with leprosy, and I hope this conference will spur it closer to the elimination milestone. Lending their support and experience were several representatives from India's health ministry, and I understand they had productive discussions with their Nepali counterparts on how to deal more effectively with leprosy cases in their common border areas.

For the last part of my visit to Nepal, I flew to Pokhara, where Dr. Iain Craighead took me

the others being TB and HIV/AIDS.

Green Pastures was established as a leprosy hospital, but with the improvement in leprosy control services and the introduction of MDT, patient numbers have fallen so it has broadened its scope to help people with all kinds of disabilities.

The hospital was once far from the town, but as Pokhara has expanded, Green Pastures is no longer the remote location it was, and this has helped to familiarize people with its work and reduce stigma toward those with the disease. In more remote areas, however, I understand that many still think of the disease as a curse and some people come directly to Green Pastures rather than to their local health center, because they don't want people in their area to know that they have leprosy.

During my tour of the grounds I saw a safe-cooking class, visited a vocational training workshop where the emphasis is on making local products and includes three months in the local bazaar learning how to sell, and saw a training farm where patients learn how to grow food in a kitchen garden and raise animals including goats and rabbits. A total of 60 to 80 people train at the farm a year, usually in small groups.

Green Pastures aims to get patients back living with their own families in their own communities, and does not encourage people to live in the residential unit. The community rehabilitation program is extremely successful, Dr. Craighead told me, and there has not been a new admission to the residential unit for over 10 years.

While in Nepal, I had the opportunity to call on King Gyanendra at the royal palace. I explained my role as goodwill ambassador and my concerns about discrimination against people with the disease. I also called on Prime Minister Koirala and outlined my mission. Both expressed their support for the efforts being made to tackle leprosy and I am hopeful that we shall see further progress in due course. ■