

Journeys to Africa and India

Poverty and discrimination remain powerful foes, as visits to Mozambique and Tanzania show; while in India, workshops focus on human rights.

MOZAMBIQUE (APRIL 20-24)

Mozambique has been developing slowly since the end of its 20-year-long civil war in 1992, but it remains one of the world's poorest nations. Over half the 17-million population lives in abject poverty and the country is battling a number of diseases that impact its social and economic development.

Where leprosy is concerned, Mozambique's PR is still rather high (2.5/10,000) compared to other countries, such as Brazil or India, that have yet to achieve elimination.

On arrival in Maputo, I received a briefing from Dr. Bokar Toure, the WHO country representative; Alfredo MacArthur, the health ministry's leprosy and TB countermeasures manager; and Alcino Ndeve, advisor on leprosy to the health ministry. As there had been an election the previous December, they weren't able to give me full details of the new government's public health strategy, as it was still being finalized. But they assured me that leprosy elimination would remain a high priority, as it had been under the previous administration. This was reiterated by the new health minister, Dr. Ivo Garrido, when I met him.

The northern and central parts of Mozambique, home to 60% of the population, are hardest hit by leprosy. There is only 30% health services coverage in these areas, and a

lack of health workers trained in the treatment and diagnosis of leprosy.

When I visited Mozambique in 2002, I traveled to two provinces in the north of the country, Nampula and Cabo Delgado, with the highest PRs, so I was interested to make a return visit to Nampula to see the progress it has been making.

In 2002, there were parts of Nampula where the PR was above 10 and even as high as 20 in some places. Today, the province-wide PR stands at 4.9. Since it is Mozambique's most densely populated province, it needs to make more progress if Mozambique is to achieve elimination.

From Nampula City, the provincial capital, I drove to the village of Namaita, about 40 kilometers away. I attended a festival promoting leprosy awareness; visited an agricultural cooperative jointly supported by ADEMO, an organization for disabled people, and ALEMO, an organization of recovered persons (these groups also run a shoe workshop in Nampula City that I visited later in the day); and donated 150 bicycles to a health center for the use of volunteer leprosy workers. I met a number of the volunteers during this visit, including recovered persons whose blue T-shirts bore the words, "I once had leprosy, but now I'm cured."

Back in Maputo, Dr. Garrido said that



Products grown and produced by recovered persons with the support of ADEMO and ALEMO, self-help organizations for the disabled and those recovered from leprosy.



Festivals such as this one in Namaita offer an opportunity to communicate important messages about leprosy.