

India's Scouts Spread the Word

Movement communicates information about leprosy at the grassroots level



14-year-old Khusbu Kumari took time out from her studies recently to attend a leprosy workshop in India's Jharkhand State.

In addition to being a student, Khusbu is also a lokdoot (communicator)

involved in the Indian scout and guide movement's effort to raise awareness about leprosy dating back to 1984.

Since 1999, the scouts have enlisted the help of persons affected by leprosy such as Khusbu, who participates in the movement's "Leprosy-free Schools" initiative by accompanying scout leaders to different schools in her home state and talking to her peers about the disease.

She says the students relate to her because she is one of them and describes herself as "very happy" doing what she does.

Scouts also go from door to door in villages,

counseling families as part of a "Leprosy Elimination Active Doorsteps" program. In addition, they take part in mass awareness campaigns, and operate mobile exhibitions at temples, bazaars and other venues.

"Scouts are trusted," says M.A. Mecci, National Joint Secretary, Scout and Guide Fellowship. "When government officials visit, people shut their doors. But when we go, they respond."

CULION CENTENARY

The Culion Sanitarium in the Philippines, formerly known as the Culion Leper Colony and now as the Culion Municipality, is preparing to observe its 100th anniversary this May.

The event, which marks the metamorphosis of Culion and its people into a thriving municipality, celebrates the community's triumph over adversity and recalls its 100-year journey toward healing.

Founded in 1906, the Culion Leper Colony was once the world's largest leprosy colony. ■

FROM THE EDITORS

IDEAS HAVE WINGS

When a good idea comes along, it's worth grabbing. The expatriate ladies who founded MESH, the Delhi-based organization that works to Maximize Employment to Serve the Handicapped (see page 4-5), started by introducing two income-generating projects to a leprosy colony north of Delhi; weaving was one, raising poultry the other. The birds came into the picture at the suggestion of a spouse, who had gone to India with the Food and Agriculture Organization to promote broiler chickens as a source of protein. The plan worked well. Chickens were raised by leprosy-affected persons, dressed and sold. The tasty meat found a ready market.

Those working in leprosy often focus on the medical or para-medical areas, but drawing on skills from other fields — agriculture, for example — in the rehabilitation of those affected by the disease is surely worth exploring further.

On a recent visit to Ethiopia, Goodwill Ambassador Sasakawa called on a farm where a new type of irrigation system is enabling farmers to spend more time working the land, yielding impressive results.

Having just visited an area of rural settlements

where persons affected by leprosy were struggling to make ends meet, it suddenly made perfect sense that the same technology should be made available to these people as well, to assist them in bettering their livelihoods.

ENALP — the Ethiopian National Association of Ex-Leprosy Patients — is already embarked on a number of income-generating projects, including oil processing and flour milling, to increase the income of rural households. With further guidance and access to improved technologies — perhaps with the help of an outside partner — they could doubtless do even more.

In overcoming stigma and discrimination, nothing succeeds like success. When people are able to make a living, and their standard of living improves, they start to grow more self-confident and gain the strength to deal with the attitudes of the uninformed.

To help in the socio-economic rehabilitation of persons affected by leprosy, let's look for hints wherever they are to be found, and create new synergies between the leprosy and non-leprosy communities, so as to open the eyes of all parties to the possibilities of creative collaboration.

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