

## Zero Leprosy Best Practices

### **Best Practice:** *Education Focused on Family Reunification and the Correct Use of Words*

#### **Subthemes**

- Reduction of stigma, discrimination, and exclusion

#### **Target Audience(s)**

- Program managers
- Persons affected by leprosy
- Other partners such as NTD NGOs

#### **Contributors**

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#### **Key Messages**

Awareness raising campaigns can be important steps in family reunification and in correcting misinformation and stopping the use of derogatory terms about leprosy and persons affected by the disease.

#### **Key Informant / Date Submitted**

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### **Description of the Best Practice**

#### **Introduction**

The need for education focused on family reunification and the correct use of words has become essential. People with Hansen's disease, including those who have long been cured, are often called derogatory names (e.g., kwatanyi, obi a n'hoyefi), which can cause them to avoid public places. Such actions are unacceptable in society and do not show respect for fellow human beings. These and other issues triggered this best practice. Through this effort, family reunification and the correct use of words were achieved successfully without any hindrances.

#### **Objectives and Methodology**

The main objective of this project was to overcome stigma and discrimination against persons with leprosy through education focused on family reunification and the correct use of words. The methods used were actions that increased awareness of the disease through the media, community durbars, and house-to-house, church-to-church, mosque-to-mosque, school-to-school, and one-on-one talks. These actions have helped about 300 people leave the leprosy camps and reunite with their families in their various communities, thus regaining the joy and love that they had lost.

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### Implementation of Practice

The main activities in this effort were awareness-raising campaigns. These activities were carried out nationally (across 16 regions of Ghana), especially in the remote areas, beginning in 2003. Flyers, placards, community announcements, and other media forms were developed as part of the campaigns. People and organizations involved in these activities included community members, program managers, people affected by Hansen's disease, chiefs and queens, association of physical challenged people, supported NGOs, and stakeholders. The Gate Foundation Ghana, Abrewa Nana Foundation, and ILEP were the main implementers and collaborators.

### Results—Outputs and Outcomes

People who had been neglected have been peacefully accepted back into their societies/communities, and the name calling of people affected by Hansen's disease and NTDs has stopped. The project was successfully completed in 2016.

### Lessons Learned

The awareness raising campaign went well because people understood the need for education on family reunification and the correct use of words. The process of achieving this awareness was an inspiring experience and many people participated. At the end of the awareness efforts, people understood the importance of getting their family members who were still in the leprosy colony back into the society. They also recognized that Hansen's disease is not a curse or the result of wrongdoing but just a disease like malaria or fever.

### Replicability and Scalability

The practice has been implemented in more than one setting. If the practice can be sustained, other forms of exclusions for persons with leprosy will wear away and enable affected people and their families to be reunited back into the communities. People will know that having Hansen's disease is like having malaria. They will also know that it is curable at no cost and that individuals seeing any form of patches on their skin should go to the hospital as early as possible to prevent any form of deformities or disabilities. Allowing affected people to participate in the awareness activities will help the efforts be sustained and monitored.

### Conclusions

The results of the awareness campaign have benefited the population. Affected individuals who lived in the leprosy colony believed they didn't have a family, and families often thought their relatives in the colony were dead. This intervention has helped many families to be reunited, and some of the affected people are now chiefs and queens in their various community. This intervention should be considered a "best practice" because it is one of the ways to overcome the stigma, discrimination, and exclusion of people affected by Hansen's disease and their family members as well as people with other NTDs.

Any country who wants to overcome the challenges associated with Hansen's disease and other NTDS should first educate the public on the need for the family reunification.