



The Damien Foundation in Bangladesh

Supporting the National Leprosy and Tuberculosis Control Programmes

The Damien Foundation is one of the operational partners of the government of Bangladesh. It supports the national programmes on leprosy and tuberculosis in 14 national districts, covering a population of about 30 million inhabitants. Although leprosy is less endemic, tuberculosis poses a major public health problem. The detection rate of tuberculosis is too low, owing to an inadequate infrastructure and lack of equipment and qualified government staff. The private sector has had a significant but negative impact on detection and treatment of tuberculosis. This is one of the factors leading to tuberculosis multi-drug resistance.

Diagnosis and high-quality treatment

The Damien Foundation has above all committed itself toward improving the detection and treatment of leprosy and tuberculosis for the concerned population. A compact network of 136 centres for diagnosing and treating the disease was set up. These centres have been incorporated into existing governmental structures. In order to make them more accessible to the population, decentralised units were also set up aided by the community. More than 5,000 traditional practitioners and patients who were cured now play the role of Directly Observed Treatment Strategy providers. Essentially, this means that they can contribute toward more effective detection and treatment of tuberculosis sufferers. There are also tuberculosis and leprosy departments operating within medical schools, jails and industrial areas.

Tuberculosis drug resistance is systematically being monitored in all districts included in the project. Treatment against this multiple resistance is given under very specific conditions. The results are encouraging.

The Damien Foundation is now doing some operational research in order to determine what the basic conditions and the best strategies are to diagnose and treat leprosy and tuberculosis efficiently. Several publications on the subject have been made for international medical magazines. A method for controlling the quality of microscopic examination which was developed in Bangladesh has been adopted as standard procedure by the international community. This method has also been incorporated into the directives of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease. The Damien Foundation also supports the national programme on technical policies and directives for diagnosis and treatment.

Since the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria came in, an efficient partnership developed between operational NGOs and the national programme. This has resulted in a realistic exchange policy of best practices. Owing to traditional practitioners and patients who were cured

acting as intermediaries, the DOTS provider concept is being implemented throughout Bangladesh. The same can be said about our Foundation's quality control system.

Increasing DOTS coverage

Despite a lot of effort and some good results, a lot still needs to be done in order to attain our objective of 70% detection of patients with tuberculosis. Our current challenge consists in increasing our technical capacity in order to guarantee a valid commitment from the governmental health authorities. We urgently need to cooperate more efficiently with the private sector i.e. doctors, paramedics and chemists. More microscopy centres are being planned to enable easier access for the population at large and, in the near future, a programme relating to cooperation on the tuberculosis-HIV front.

Summary

Start of the project	1972
Local partner	Ministry of Health
Project type	First leprosy only Leprosy and tuberculosis since 1993
Population covered in 2006	32,804,835
Patients detected and treated in 2006	22,256 tuberculosis patients 987 leprosy patients
Expenditure in 2006	€ 898,389