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ENHANCING THE ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF LEPROSY SERVICES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS: EXPERIENCE FROM INDIA.

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Preferred Presentation Method: Oral or Eposter

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Introduction: Declining expertise and commitment among General Health Staff in leprosy poses serious challenge in improving the access and sustainability of leprosy services in India. So there is an urgent need to develop sustainable leprosy service delivery model with increased participation and empowerment of local community.

Methods: Damien Foundation in India conducted an observational study to examine the feasibility of involving civil society organizations to implement sustainable leprosy services in Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu in the year 2012. Four developmental NGOs with good network at the grass root level were identified to cover the whole district. These NGOs are mainly involved in women empowerment through facilitating self help groups in villages to deliver microfinance services, rural development, education of children and health education. NGO with experience in leprosy control was made as nodal NGO with the mandate to select NGOs, train them in self care and identification of suspects, establish coordination with the government health system, also the monitoring and supervision of four local NGOs. The Local NGOs were requested to submit the monthly reports to nodal NGO. The intervention package for the involvement of local NGOs includes updating the disability register; visit persons affected by leprosy with disability to support and motivate them to practice self care; support patients under treatment; refer patients with complication; identify, provide and monitor the livelihood support of needy affected persons and facilitate to receive government entitlements and dissemination of message on leprosy and suspect referral.

Results: The NGO staff and volunteers updated the list of persons affected by leprosy with disability. Initial list of 505 persons affected by leprosy with disabilities received from district leprosy office was updated by the local NGOs and the numbers became 410 after additions and deletions from the list. An assessment after one year of implementation showed a remarkable improvement in the proportion of disability cases practicing self care from 16% to 89% and all of them were frequently followed up by local NGO members. Around 70% of plantar ulcers healed. There are 35 new leprosy cases confirmed from 323 suspects referred by the local NGOs. Fifty one persons were identified and supported with socio economic assistance. The most promising result was change in the mindset of the community towards persons affected by leprosy. The local NGOs members were able to provide counseling, assist them to receive government entitlements and ensure regular practice of self care.

Conclusion: Involvement of civil society organizations to improve the access and sustainability of the leprosy services is feasible. The short term results of the pilot project is encouraging and long term impact of the project need to be studied in future.

Disclosure of Interest: None Declared