

INNOVATIVE WAYS OF REACHING AND BENEFITING THE POOREST AND MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE

The Experience of Leprosy Rehabilitation

Padma Venkataraman, Honorary Director,
Leprosy Rehabilitation Project
Vice President, Women's Indian Association,
Chennai, India

***“Leprosy work is not only medical relief, it is transforming frustration
of life into joy of dedication, personal ambition into selfless service”***

(Mahatma Gandhi)

A five year Project, ending in 2003, was implemented by the Women's Indian Association Chennai, under the directorship of Mrs. Padma Venkataraman, for the rehabilitation of cured leprosy affected persons in ten Government-run Homes and 31 colonies spread over Tamil Nadu, India. It was primarily funded by DANIDA but supplemented significantly by a variety of donors. The introduction of micro-credit to the leprosy affected persons was the most successful and **innovative** component of the Project which also covered the development of agricultural infrastructure and cultivation in the Homes and the provision of health and hygiene facilities in the colonies. The sustainability conditions created in the Project have enabled activities to continue even after the Project's conclusion.

Background

Stigma and poverty dog the footsteps of a leprosy affected person even after cure. Physical deformities which are often a cruel legacy of this dreaded disease tend to restrict or prevent participation in mainstream activities in general and particularly income generating activities. This leads to frustration, cynicism and lack of self-confidence and dignity.

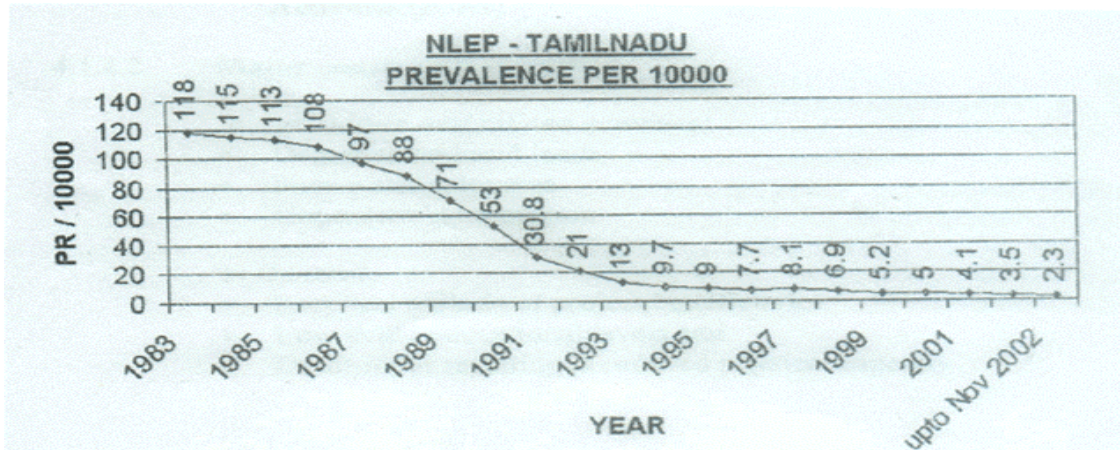
The Need

The necessity to reach out to this poorest and most vulnerable section of society is the immediate need of the hour. The sympathy of people for the leprosy affected stops with handing out some doles. Neither the society nor the leprosy-affected people themselves can imagine that these marginalized people could be productive members of society.

The suffering that leprosy affected persons undergo is unique and without parallel. The telltale symptoms of leprosy (ulcer and deformities) force the affected persons

- to segregate themselves from the family and society
- to take drastic measures like committing suicide
- to lose jobs
- to take to begging, drug peddling to eke out a livelihood
- to lose self-confidence, self-esteem and basic human rights

Leprosy in Tamil Nadu – a glance



Given Tamil Nadu Government's impressive medical record under the National Leprosy Eradication Programme, the incidence has come down drastically over the years, necessitating

- * socioeconomic rehabilitation of the cured patients
 - viable and sustainable income generating opportunities for them
 - creation of awareness on issues of Hygiene, Health and Nutrition
 - their integration into mainstream

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED BY THE PROJECT

The problems addressed by the Project were: 'Begging', 'Dependence on Doles' in colonies and 'Idling' in Homes. To tackle these problems, the Project picked these slogans as its mottoes: '*From Begging to Productivity*'

and '*Teach a Man to fish and you feed him forever*'. Thus the activities were designed towards

- Creating income generating opportunities through micro-credit thereby enabling them to earn some income and imparting to them self-confidence and dignity.
- Improving existing skills
- Creating the right environment/infrastructure—psychological, physical and financial
- Creating awareness of the importance of health, hygiene and nutrition

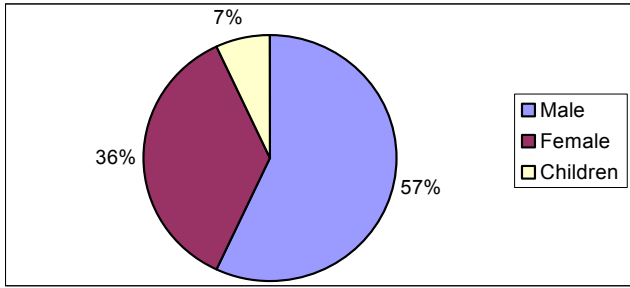
MICRO CREDIT IN LEPROSY COLONIES

In colonies, income-generating activities (IGA) according to aptitude and physical ability were identified and skills imparted. It was felt that if the amount available under the project were to be given as grant it would remain as one-time assistance and with a very limited reach. Hence the concept of Micro-credit was envisaged to instill commitment as well as create a viable alternative to begging which non-existed. Moreover, the concept of a Revolving Fund was evolved to enable greater coverage and sustainability. Micro-credit was also extended to selected inmates in the Government run homes for dairy and other productive activities.

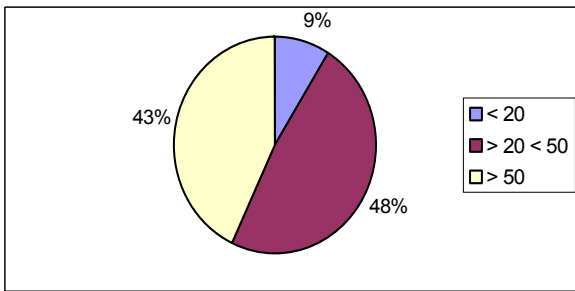
The following was the profile of beneficiaries at the start of the Project which is indicative of low level of skills physical ability and educational qualification.

Survey Findings at Homes

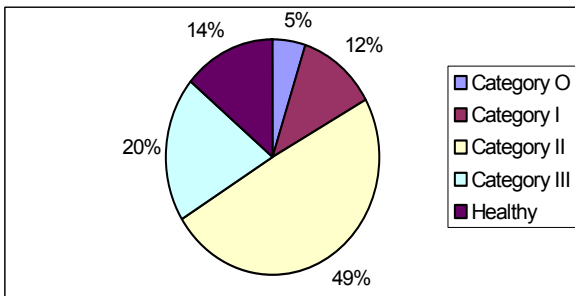
- II Profile of Inmates
 - (a) Demographic Profile of Inmates



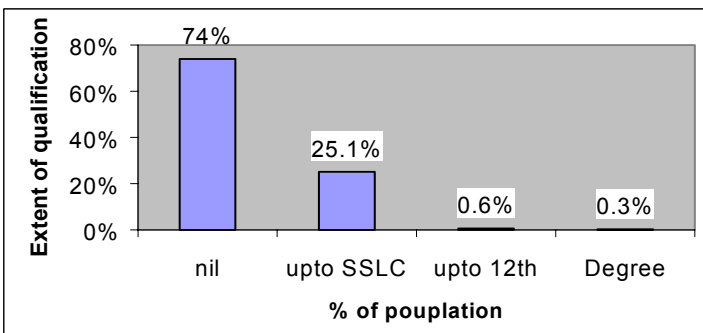
(b) Age Profile of Inmates



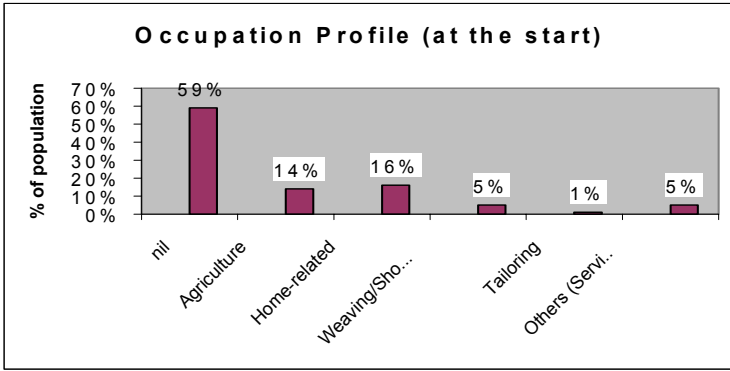
(c) 'Extent of Disability' Profile



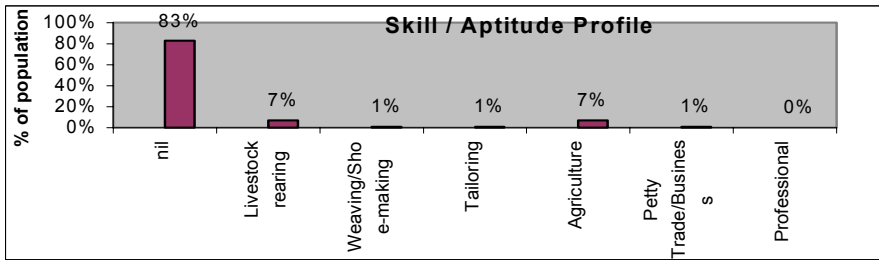
(d) Education Profile of Inmates



(e) Occupational Profile of Inmates (at the start of the Project)

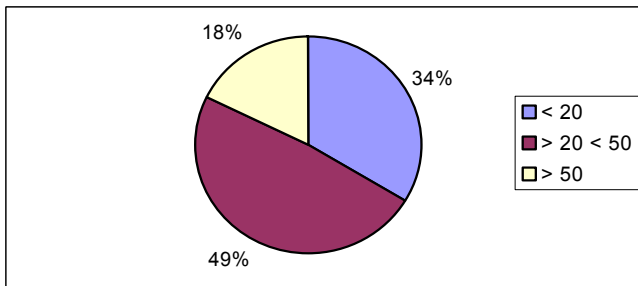


Skill / Aptitude Levels of Inmates (at the start of the Project)

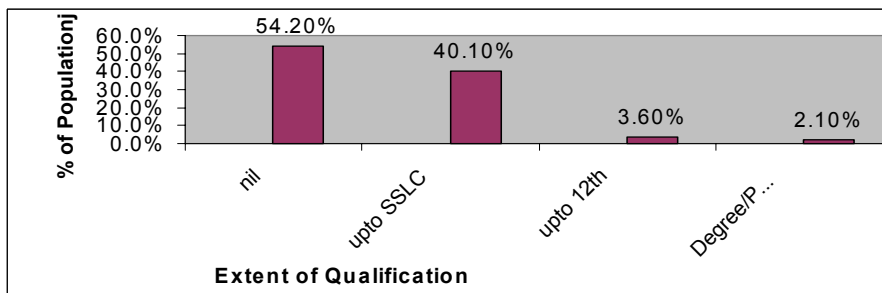


Survey Findings at Colonies

(a) Age Profile of Colony residents

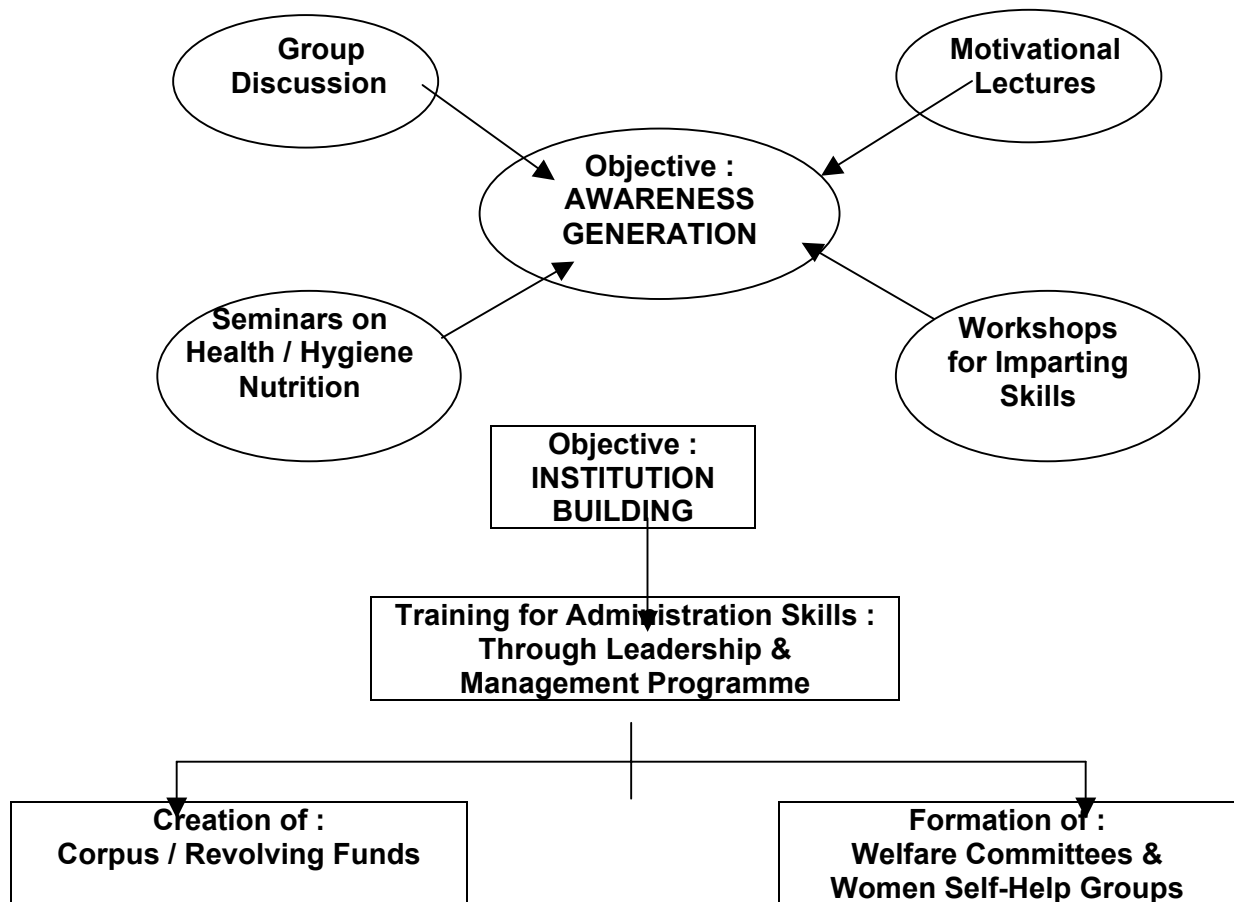


b) Education Profile of Colony residents



Awareness Generation And Institution Building Activities

The diagrams below capture the methodology followed.



DESIGN OF THE PROJECT

Monitoring of Project Implementation	Design
<p>Personnel Deployment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture co-ordinator • Farm Managers for homes • Field officers for colonies <p>Reporting - Review System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of reporting formats • Weekly, monthly and quarterly 	<p>10 Homes and 31 Colonies 1997 - 2003 Awareness creation and motivation Enlisting co-operation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Socio Economic Survey <i>To identify education level skills, apptitude and physical</i></p>



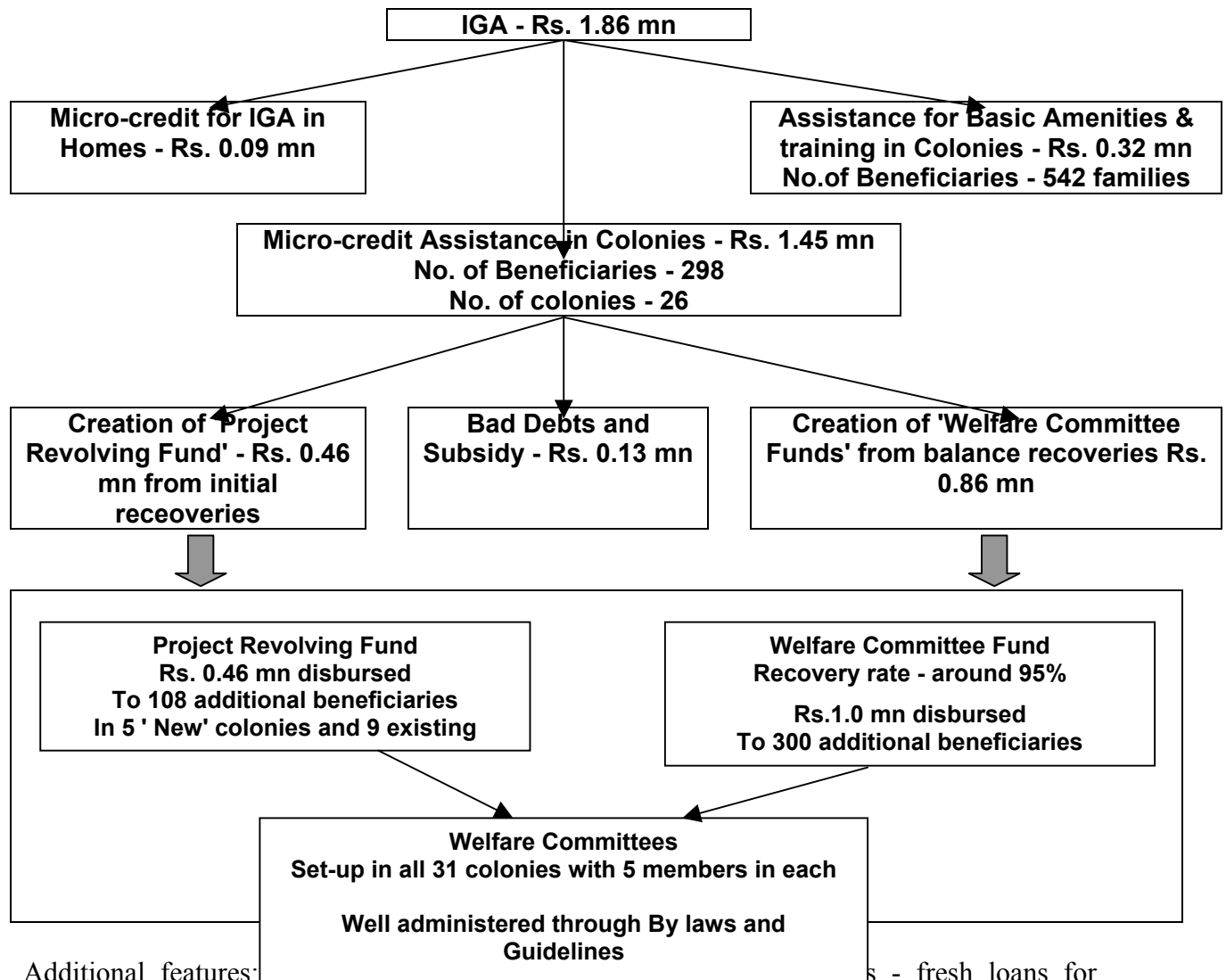
<p>review meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six monthly reports for DANIDA. • Interaction with Government of Tamilnadu <p>Provision of check and balances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly visits to oversee implementation • Audits <p>Troubleshooting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ready and direct access to beneficiaries 	<p><i>and psychological ability.</i></p> <p>For agriculture in Homes - Infrastructure facilities - Dairy units and other off farm activities through micro credit</p> <p>For income generating activities in colonies - Assistance through micro credit and formation of Self Help Groups.</p> <p>Marketing - Exploration of suitable tie-ups for marketing</p> <p>Concurrent Activities : Awareness generation on nutrition, health and hygiene through seminars, workshops and training programmes.</p> <p>Sustainability - Creation of self management system - Creation of Corpus fund / welfare committee fund and self management system.</p>
--	---

ACTIVITIES FUNDED

An illustrative list includes:

Cut-piece cloth trade, utensils vending, plastic articles vending, tea/tiffin/fruit drinks stall, vegetable/fruit vending, coconut vending, flower sales, rice sales, fish vending, grocery, sheep and goat rearing, milch cattle rearing and milk sales, poultry, tailoring shop, wire basket making, bicycle hire, autorickshaw services, fish-cart transport, spray painting, centering material hire, beauty parlour, sound system, data entry, computer training, paper bags etc.

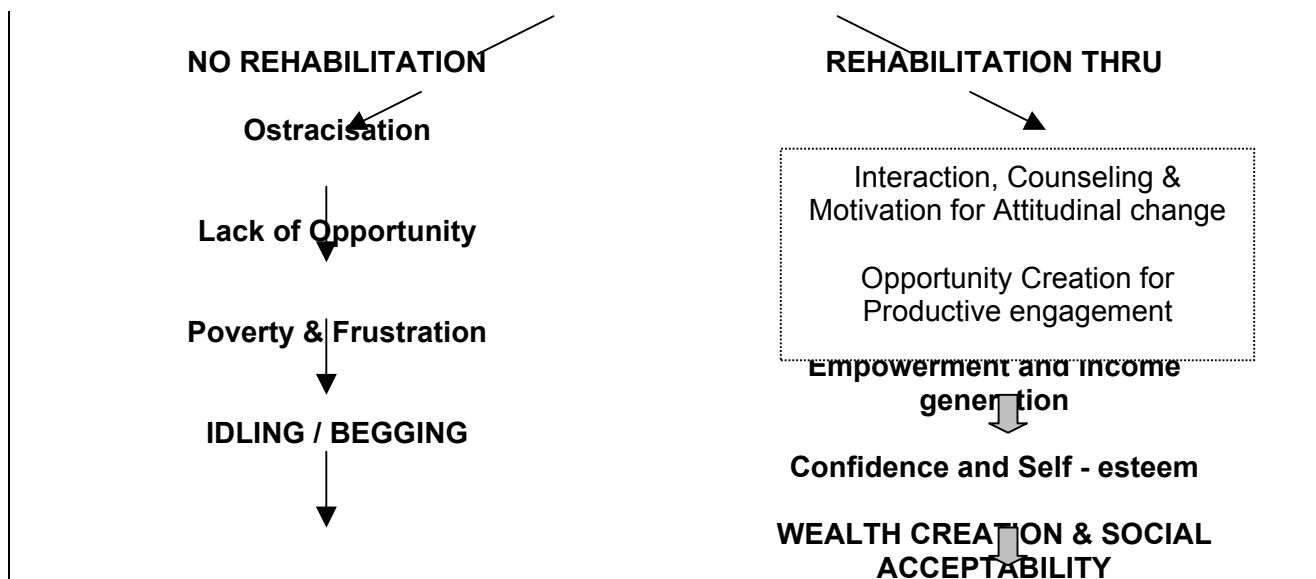
RESULTS OF MICROCREDIT PROGRAMME DURING THE PROJECT



Additional features: fresh loans for expansion of business - availability of money for education / marriage of children - major health care etc. purchase of land for constructing house.

A DIAGRAMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE PSYCHO-SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION ACHIEVED BY THE PROJECT





SUSTAINED PROGRESS AFTER THE PROJECT



Every colony is utilising its revolving fund for expansion of old business and starting new ones. Every month 4 - 5 members in each of 31 colonies are benefiting. all transactions are done through banks and the Hon. Project director monitors the work once a month. In Homes, beneficiaries continue to supply the entire milk requirements of Homes and also supplies vegetables and pulses to supplement the requirement of Homes. Fruits are consumed by the inmates and occasionally sold in the market. These activities have promoted employment opportunities for the inmates.

Excluding the amount in circulation as loans the amount currently available for rotation :

- Revolving fund (Colonies)Rs. 500,000
- In Homes (Corpus Fund) Rs. 400,000

The rate of repayment which the above balances reflect has been very impressive, particularly considering the nature and circumstances of the beneficiaries.

CONCLUSION

We have a long way to go to overcome discrimination and restore basic human rights

People do not want to beg – if given alternatives fitting their aptitude and skill levels. People can be motivated – it only requires patience and understanding. Leading them to an income earning opportunity is more important than doles and sympathy. Earning an income however small transforms the attitudes of the leprosy affected persons.

The potential of microcredit to this section of society, hitherto unreached, and indeed considered unreachable, has been demonstrated. More can be achieved if resources are available. The concept of "revolving fund" and self management through welfare committees have facilitated sustainability.

Owing to effectiveness of Multi Drug Therapy and integration of leprosy work with primary healthcare system by the Government, NGOs should concentrate on community based rehabilitation of the cured patients so that formation of ghettos can be prevented.

Together we can achieve the goal of reaching and benefiting the poorest and the most vulnerable people.

Contact address:

3/357, AGS Colony Beach Layout, Kottivakkam, Chennai – 41, India.

Phone: (91) (44) 24511655, 24511671

Cell phone: 98400-31327

e-mail: kvenkat1@vsnl.com