

Addressing Skill Gap by Empowering Tribal Women in Leprosy Care



Organization: LEPRA Society

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INTRODUCTION

- **Leprosy** remains endemic in India, contributing to nearly 60% of the global burden, with over 107,851 new cases reported annually, despite being curable through multidrug therapy (MDT). Over time, there has been a **decline in health providers capable of clinically diagnosing leprosy**.
- The involvement of **female healthcare workers is crucial**, alongside strong community engagement. Responding to this need, **LEPRA Society piloted the Physio Care Assistants (PCAs) initiative, training women affected by leprosy especially from hard-to-reach areas to become community health workers.**

PCA IMPLEMENTATION IN NABRANGPUR DISTRICT, ODISHA

Engage in **Active Case Finding (ACF)** including **focal surveys, contact surveys, and school-based screening** in collaboration with ASHAs and field coordinators.

Participate in **Disability Prevention and Medical Rehabilitation (DPMR)** clinics at CHCs and District Hospitals



Organize **awareness meetings and community education sessions** to address stigma and promote healthcare-seeking behavior.

LEPRA Referral Centre serves three blocks with tribal pollution **Nabarangpur (62%), Kosagumuda (41%), and Papadahandi (41%).**

PCAs also visit 5–10 villages, 350–400 HHs for ACF, monitoring adherence to **Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT)** among individuals under treatment, conducting **Nerve Function Assessments (NFA)** and **ulcer care**

Unit of Implementation: PCAs are primarily stationed at LEPRA Referral Centers at the Primary Health Centre/Community Health Centre /District Hospital level

OBJECTIVE

To **train and empower women affected by leprosy in tribal communities**, promoting long-term community engagement and sustainable healthcare solutions across 9 operational states - Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Telangana

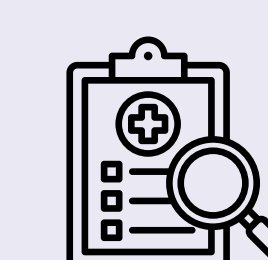
METHODOLOGY

- A **6-month hands-on training program** (offline and online) covering the basics of **leprosy, physiotherapy, and ulcer management to support rehabilitation efforts.**
- The curriculum was developed in collaboration with the **Schieffelin Institute of Health Research and Leprosy Center (SIHRLC), Tamil Nadu**

FINDINGS AND WAY FORWARD



Identification of **325 new leprosy cases.**



2800 cases monitored - Under Treatment (UT) and Released from Treatment (RFT).



300 individuals with Nerve Function Impairment (NFI) or leprosy reactions are followed up



~ 2800 received ulcer care. Reached around 10000 HH for Active Case Finding



Supported 3000 individuals for linking to rehabilitation programs



Many PCAs are **either affected or were previously infected with leprosy, enabling them to empathize deeply with patients** and provide culturally sensitive support. The use of **local dialects** improved community engagement, treatment adherence, and health-seeking behavior.

Rise in female case detection, indicating improved healthcare who were underdiagnosed due to social and cultural barriers.



Digital training through e-learning modules as a way forward



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