

Nepal Leprosy Trust - a review of 2018

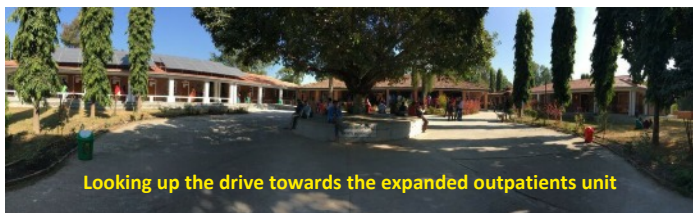
Dear Friends and Supporters,

Nepal has been through some difficult times in the last few years, with the earthquakes in 2015, the border blockade from 2015 to 2016, and then the difficult monsoon rains in 2017. Nepal continues to be very poor, with GDP per capita still 8th from bottom in the world and a very slow economic growth rate compared to world averages. Nevertheless, Nepal has been re-designing itself, with the long-awaited new Constitution finally approved, and the dividing of Nepal into seven new federal provinces and 77 districts. This has been an uncomfortable process but seems to be settling down, with new administrations developing to enable power to be devolved from Kathmandu to the various province centres.



For NLT, this has required the development of a new network of contacts at municipality, district and province levels, with new agreements and permissions for our work from all these levels. Some partner organisations that were engaged with leprosy work in districts now assigned to our area - Province 2 - have pulled out, and handed over their workloads to Lalgadh. This means that NLT will have significant responsibilities in 8 Terai districts rather than 4. The positive aspect is that more of our future negotiations will be with administrations directly representing the people who benefit from our work rather than with remote central government officers.

While trying to find our place in all this, the team at Lalgadh has also had to develop a new 5 year Project Agreement, outlining to the Nepal Government our intended activities and goals for the next five years. This is based on Lalgadh's 5-year Strategic Plan developed last year with the help of American Leprosy Missions, our main strategic partner. It also reflects the ever-growing demand for our services, which reached 120,000 patient consultations last year and will be at least that this year. These patients come from a wide area of southern Nepal and northern India. In the first three quarters of 2018 almost 1000 new cases of leprosy were diagnosed and, by the end of 2018, this total will be over 1200 (30% of these new cases are from India). Of the non-leprosy patient visits, 98% (about 105,000) are for skin problems, so this area has become our second speciality after leprosy. An important aim for Lalgadh is to become more sustainable, and this high demand for dermatology services is helping towards that.



The new outpatient facilities completed in 2017 (funded by ALM, USAID, and Fairmed) have been a great help in handling the high

patient numbers during 2018. Staff and patients have really appreciated the improved consultation and waiting spaces, which have made the challenge of serving up to 800 patients in a day more bearable for everyone. We are enormously grateful to ALM, USAID and Fairmed for helping develop LLHSC to be suitable for the growing workload, both now and in the future.



Linked to this development is a wonderful new relationship with Indiana University, USA, whose dermatopathology managers have provided placements for two of our key staff at their dermatopathology department in Indiana to build up skills in this vital area. This included a one-year fellowship for our leading doctor, Dr Krishna Tamang, and a one month stay for our laboratory supervisor Ravi Nepali (both of whom grew up in a leprosarium in Kathmandu). The new skills will be a strong support for our busy dermatology service at Lalgaadh.

Dr Graeme Clugston and his wife Meena have continued to support the work at Lalgaadh, including raising funds for a children's ward that provides a child-friendly environment for young people who need to be admitted. Dr Donald Sammut, a UK hand surgeon,



has worked with us for a number of years and continues to take time out from his busy schedule to come to Nepal and provide valuable training and support for world-class reconstructive surgery. This benefits leprosy-affected and general patients.

Our inpatient service has remained fairly steady with about 850 admissions by the end of 2018.

More than 600 of these people are affected by leprosy - mainly by reactions or complicated ulcers. The others had a variety of acute or emergency conditions including burns, malaria, TB, fractures, fevers, cuts, and gastric problems. About 40 babies will have been delivered too. For non-leprosy services, there is strong local competition for both inpatient and outpatient work, and it is a real testimony to our good reputation that we have so many people coming to a leprosy centre for non-leprosy treatment.

The busy community programme has continued through 2018, including a project to develop and strengthen the many existing self-help groups. This uses experience gained from previous work to add skills to these groups and make them more effective in their communities at advocacy and at developing their villages. This helps to increase their



standing and participation in community life. All the studies done on these groups show that they have been highly effective in changing attitudes in their communities, and in creating an environment that is sympathetic and supportive towards people with disabilities. In one area we have worked with ten of these groups to enable them to be effective in

detecting leprosy in their communities. They have found a number of new cases.

The self help groups have also enabled us to support others too, one area being to assist extremely vulnerable families with the rebuilding of houses damaged by the 2017 floods. Some of you very kindly contributed to this work and we were able to rebuild seven houses in Inarwaha village, as well as a number of houses in other places. Inarwaha village was also desperate for help with building toilets, and we provided support for toilets for 38 families with funds provided by NLT Ireland.



The self help groups are key partners in establishing our Village Alive programme. VAP projects have benefited a number of very poor villages with support and training in group work involving all the village members, leading to improvements in the village in key areas chosen by the groups themselves. These usually include education, health (especially mother and child health), water, and village cleanliness, including sanitation. The groups are usually a women's group, a men's (farmers) group, and an adolescent

girls' group; and when each group works together it is amazing what they achieve. NLT also trains one lady volunteer in primary health care and she supports the mothers and children with care and advice.



In November, Mike from NLT UK and Vera from NLT Ireland visited Dhamaura village, where VAP work started a year ago. About 140 men and women came to meet them and

explain what had been good about VAP so far: the women were enjoying meeting together - previously they fought and argued and never met in a group; the children were now going to school; the men had stopped drinking; the village was much cleaner; the water supply was better as a new wall gave privacy to the women; the women's and children's health was better; the groups have a growing savings scheme which supports individual projects. They have learned that they can improve things themselves with a little outside help. Faces were happy and smiling and the mood was very positive; and there are two more years of support from NLT to come for this village.

This story mirrors the previous experiences of seven other villages with VAP, and we plan to start VAP in a further four villages in 2019. Our engagement with these villages does not stop at the end of a VAP project, and we continue to meet with them and to respond with support when they have new ideas they need help with. We are very grateful to our field staff whose dedication makes this work possible. NLT's self help group and VAP work affects several thousand lives and has made a very positive impact.

In Kathmandu we are very relieved that the road adjacent to our headquarters building has now been resurfaced, so the mud and dust, and threat of further demolition, are history. The handicraft workshops, which employ some people affected by leprosy as well as other disabled and poor people, continue to produce and sell leather, felt and batik products. We need more sales, but it is encouraging to see how these workshops have endured and provided employment for a number of staff for many years.



Lydia Children's Fund, supporting education for about 85 children from very poor backgrounds, is to expand slightly to include more children in the Lalgadh area. If you



are able to support a child's education at £15 per month please do consider it and contact us - it is a tremendous opportunity to build into someone's future and beat the curse of poverty. The Kathmandu office is involved in a variety of other social work, and we are grateful for all that the staff there do, including in support of the rest of the work of NLT.

As we draw to the close of 2018, we reflect on the faithfulness of God, and so many friends, in providing for the great range of activities that are undertaken by NLT. We had the great privilege in November of celebrating the 25th anniversary of the church at Lalgadh, which was established in 1993 while the hospital was being built, and which has quietly remained a key part of all that happens there. Thanks to its wonderful staff, the reputation of Lalgadh continues to grow and to draw more and more people from far and wide, having heard that they will be helped by "Lalgadh medicine". The community work has continued through every difficulty, amongst the poorest people in the Terai, and remains an important key to changing hearts and minds and removing the stigma against leprosy. This in turn encourages people to come early for treatment and has taken away much of the fear surrounding this terrible disease. Thank you all so much for being part of this great story, begun by Eileen Lodge, and now told in the book "A Touch of Providence" published this year - another landmark!



We deeply appreciate the support that many individuals, church groups and organizations have given NLT throughout the last year, whether financial or in prayer, and we hope that this brief review of our work through 2018 is an encouragement to you.

***Wishing you all a very blessed Christmas,
with our thanks, the NLT UK Team***

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