Letter to the Editor

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF GAEL

The following is an abstract of a letter sent by WHO to all GAEL partners, including ILEP, after the independent evaluation of GAEL in June 2003. I believe this addresses most, if not all, of the issues mentioned in the three editorials in Volume 75, Number 3, September 2004 edition of the Leprosy Review, and at the same time clarifies WHO’s present position on the global efforts to eliminate leprosy as a public health problem.

Summary of the recommendations of the independent evaluation of GAEL

- Strengthening or creating strong country task forces on leprosy to better coordinate national leprosy efforts.
- Effectively, efficiently and independently monitoring and evaluating country leprosy control programmes.
- Continuing partnership with Novartis, The Nippon Foundation and the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation.
- Participating in a collaborative forum in which NGOs and foundations take the lead in refining GAEL’s approach to advocacy, technical exchange and information exchange on key policy, strategy and operational matters.
- Continuing to seek the best possible technical advice from the WHO Technical Advisory Group for Elimination of Leprosy, seeking the views of NGOs and foundations as it appoints additional members.

Proposed actions by WHO

1. WHO, through its regional and country offices, will continue to work with all countries that remain leprosy endemic, especially those with high prevalence, to facilitate the creation and/or strengthening of national task forces on leprosy and the activities of those task forces.
2. WHO, in collaboration with its partners, will intensify the implementation of leprosy elimination monitoring exercises (LEMs) in countries, and the results will be reviewed and analysed by the Technical Advisory Group for Elimination of Leprosy.
3. WHO will broaden membership of the Technical Advisory Group for Elimination of Leprosy with additional experts in leprosy control, rehabilitation, and monitoring and evaluation being named by the Director General and selected from a list of experts proposed by the partners and by WHO, and will continue the Group’s activities beyond the year 2005.
4. WHO will continue negotiations with the Novartis Foundation on the extension of collaboration that will continue to ensure multidrug therapy at no cost to countries beyond the year 2005; and WHO will continue its regular dialogue with the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation aimed at identifying the form in which collaboration might continue after 2005.
5. WHO will propose to GAEL partners, both present and past, a new way of collaborating through an enhanced forum that will assign roles to various partners in maintaining the partnership, and WHO will facilitate these activities in a way that is agreeable to the partners. A possible way of ensuring
enhancement of forum activities would be through a secondment of a forum coordinator to WHO by one of the partners, with terms of reference developed by the partners in advance; present and past members will be canvassed regarding the feasibility of such a secondment, and if this is not feasible the partners will be convened electronically to determine a way forward, this task being delegated to the partner or partners who volunteer to convene the group electronically.

6. Finally, the WHO Secretariat, in collaboration with the partners forum, will begin work on a proposed World Health Assembly Resolution for leprosy activities beyond 2005 which will not only signal the attainment of the global target for leprosy elimination, but will also, and very importantly, ensure a broad-based approach to the control of leprosy after 2005 including the avoidance of nerve damage and the rehabilitation of those in need.

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