

## Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign (SLAC) : An Approach to Create Mass Awareness on Leprosy

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Received : 24.08.2017

Accepted : 11.09.2017

Leprosy is a chronic disease, which has been eliminated at the National Level, but there are Districts & Blocks which are still having prevalence rate >1/10,000 population. Approx. 127334 new leprosy cases reported from all States & UTs by routine reporting system. However, a large number of cases still remain hidden and the main reason is high level of stigma attached to leprosy. To address this issue "Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign" (SLAC) was launched on 30th January, 2017, which is 'ANTI LEPROSY DAY, is being launched nationwide to increase awareness about various aspects of leprosy and to remove stigma associated with leprosy. Objectives of SLAC are to create mass awareness in community on leprosy, to reduce stigma and discrimination in community and for early detection of Leprosy cases. The campaign was organized in cooperation and coordination with other Departments/Ministries such as Panchayati Raj Institutions, Rural Development, Urban Development, Women & Child Development, Department of School Education & Literacy, Social Justice & Empowerment and Ministry of Agriculture. On this occasion, the Gram Sabhas were organized in all villages for leprosy awareness. After intervention, there is major shift in understanding about the leprosy disease which will ensure early detection of all leprosy cases and therefore decrease in hidden cases and visible deformity.

**Keywords :** Sparsh, Awareness, Leprosy, Campaign, Mass

### Background

Leprosy is a chronic disease with a long incubation period (average 5-7 years). Although the disease has been eliminated at the National Level, there are Districts & Blocks which are still having prevalence rate >1/10,000 population. Approx. 127334 new leprosy cases reported from all States & UTs by routine reporting system.

However, a large number of cases still remain hidden. The reasons for high number undetected / hidden cases are either low priority to leprosy of States after elimination or low interest of District and sub-district level staff in leprosy case detection (fear of administrative action) or low reporting by community because of stigma and discrimination attached with the disease.

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In order to detect the hidden leprosy cases, Leprosy Case Detection Campaign (LCDC), on the lines of Pulse Polio Campaign was conducted in 2016 in 163 high endemic districts and more than 32500 new cases have been detected. Further to address this issue "Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign" was launched on 30th January 2017, which is 'ANTI LEPROSY DAY. It was launched nationwide to increase awareness about various aspects of leprosy and to remove stigma associated with leprosy. The thrust of this campaign was to promote community participation to reorient the delivery of the services of diagnosis and treatment of leprosy in its early stages. The awareness programme was observed at State, District Block and Village level.

### Objectives

**Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign was launched to**

1. To create mass awareness in community on leprosy,
2. To reduce stigma and discrimination in community and
3. To early detection of Leprosy cases.

### Methodology

The campaign was organized in cooperation and coordination with other Departments/Ministries such as Panchayati Raj Institutions, Rural Development, Urban Development, Women & Child Development, Department of School Education & Literacy, Social Justice & Empowerment and Ministry of Agriculture. On this occasion, there were meetings of Gram Sabhas in all villages for leprosy awareness which was monitored by State and District Leprosy Officer.

Preparatory Steps for Implementation of this awareness campaign are described in Table 1.

**Table 1 : Preparatory steps for implementation of Sparsh Leprosy Awareness campaign**

Meeting with IEC experts in collaboration with WHO on 12th Dec, 2016	To finalize the key messages and to discuss the other modalities for 'The Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign'
Central Level Workshop with State Leprosy Officers Partners and Experts {on 29th-30th December, 2016 in Jharkhand, Ranchi}.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To Chalk out detailed plan of activities</li> <li>2. Mobilization of Resources</li> <li>3. Finalization of IEC Messages</li> </ol>
State Level Meeting was conducted on 1st week of January, 2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Finalization of Pamphlets and message</li> <li>2. To plan the supervision and monitoring strategies</li> </ol>
District level Meeting with District Leprosy Officer & Stake holders was conducted on 2nd week of January, 2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Micro-planning of this 'The Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign'</li> <li>2. Preparing of Checklist of Monitoring this campaign</li> </ol>
Preparatory Panchayat Level Meeting with Members of Panchayat Gao-Pradhan & representative from village was conducted on 3rd week of January, 2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Detailed activity was shared with Panchayat</li> <li>2. Pamphlet was distributed and message was circulated at village level</li> </ol>

The logo for Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign, 2017 was finalized during preparatory stage (Fig. 1).

#### Media coverage

The media sensitization was done by the Central Leprosy Division in advance at National Level. And as a result of it, advance article regarding Sparsh campaign was already published in Pioneer Delhi on 27<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2016. (Fig. 2)

#### Observations at the time of Preparatory Steps

- In the Meeting with Information Education Communication (IEC) experts which was held in collaboration with WHO on 12<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2016, the key messages to be displayed during SLAC campaign were finalized and also discussed the various modalities for 'The Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign' for Implementation.
- The Central Level Workshop with State Leprosy Officers Partners and Experts, were held on 29<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> December, 2016 in Jharkhand, Ranchi. Wherein, finalization of

Guidelines document for SLAC has been done Based on input of State leprosy officers, stakeholders, experts, representatives of Association of Persons Affected with Leprosy (APAL) etc. Again activities to be conducted at Gram Sabha on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2017 was finalized such as **message** from District Magistrate (read by DM (if available) or representative from village), **appeal** from Gram Sabha Pramukh, Pledge taken by all Gram Sabha members and **felicitation** of representative from person affected with leprosy (if available) by Gram Sabha Pramukh and the last is Questions and answers session based on FAQ provided to Gram Sabha Pramukh or representative from village.

- The responsibilities of various level officers for this SLAC are listed in Table 2.
- **Under the State Level Meeting in various states which were conducted on 1st week of January, 2017 and following steps were undertaken during this period:**



Fig. 1 : The logo for Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign, 2017

**PRESS MONITOR** Pioneer, Delhi  
Tue, 27 Dec 2016, Page 5  
Width: 25.32 cms, Height: 38.53 cms, a3, Ref: 28.2016-12.27.145

## LEPROSY AWARENESS

### 'Sparsh' campaign to involve gram sabhas, panchayats

Nationwide panchayat meetings and gram sabhas to be held across States on Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary

**NEW CASES DETECTED**

STATE	CASES
Bihar	4404
Odisha	4399
Maharashtra	3528
Gujarat	3500
Uttar Pradesh	2058
West Bengal	2664
Chattisgarh	2560

Development, Urban Development, Women and Child Development and Social Justice and Empowerment Ministries will join hands to organize the awareness campaign at gram sabha which are envisaged as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj system.

A village having population not less than 1500 forms Gram Sabha and every adult of the village is member of Gram Sabha. However, in some states, a Gram Sabha may be formed even if the population is less than 1500.

The need to reach out to gram sabhas has been felt fol-

Intensifying its leprosy detection campaign in the country, the Union Health Ministry has decided to organise a massive awareness campaign wherein nationwide panchayat meetings and gram sabhas will be held across the States on the death anniversary of

tion with various Central ministries," an official from the National Leprosy Elimination Programme (NLEP) said.

Fig. 2 : Coverage in Pioneer

**Table 2 : Responsibilities assigned to various level officers for SLAC**

State Leprosy Officer (SLO)	District Leprosy Officer (DLO)	Block PHC Medical Officers (Block PHC MO)
1. To coordinate with Central Leprosy Division, State-level authorities and District-level authorities	2. To coordinate with State, District and Block level authorities	Nodal person who is accountable for celebration of 30th January as per the activities specified in the guidelines.
2. To sensitize all District Leprosy Officers (DLO)	2. To sensitize all Block PHC Medical Officers (Block PHC MO)	
3. To disseminate various prototypes to districts	3. To disseminate various prototypes to blocks	
	4. Planning and implementation of IEC activities in urban areas with help of NGOs, International Organizations, Rotary Club, Lion Club, etc	

**Preparatory Activities: Sparsh****Fig 3 ( a, b, c, d) : Some Glimpses of preparatory activities for SLAC**



- ✧ Formation of Task force and Plan of action for Intra and Inter sectorial coordination
- ✧ State coordination committee meetings
- ✧ State IEC committee meetings
- ✧ State level workshop (for District and Block level officers)
- ✧ Hon. ACS, PHD & Hon, MD. NHM were sensitized regarding SLAC
- ✧ Media Sensitization.
- ✧ Instructions given for formation of District level committee according to guidelines.
- ✧ Sensitization of DHS/CMOs/DLOs/DHOs about fortnight activity,
- ✧ Mobilization of resources (Man Materials and Money), development of media plan, finalization, translation, printing and distribution of IEC materials, distribution of guidelines.
- ✧ Focused on hard to reach area.
- ✧ Finalized plan the supervision & monitoring strategies.
- ✧ Coordination and sensitization was done with members of Municipal Council, President and members of District Panchayat, Village Sarpanch.
- ✧ Letter was issued from Health Dept to Education, ICDS, Social Welfare, PRI members and elected representatives.
- ✧ Prepared the checklist for monitoring the campaign.
- ✧ For coordination at village level, Village Health and Sanitation Committee were responsible for implementation. The event was facilitated by respective Multi Purpose Workers (MPWs), Village revenue official e.g., patwari, Gramsevik, School Teacher,

ASHA and Anganwadi Worker etc.

- ✧ **Activities undertaken at village level** are enumerated below and some glimpses are shown in Fig 4 (a-e).

- **Message was delivered from District Magistrate office**

**Sample Message:**

Dear brothers and sisters

You are aware that Leprosy is still a problem in our district/country. Leprosy is a common disease. It is caused by bacteria called Lepra bacilli. It is not contagious and treatment is freely available at all government hospitals and health facilities.

If Leprosy is identified and diagnosed early then it is completely curable and physical disfigurement can be prevented. The duration of treatment is either six or 12 months.....



**Fig. 4a**



**Fig.4b**



Fig. 4C



Fig. 4d

Fig. 4e

• **Appeal from Gram Sabha Pramukh**

**Sample Appeal:**

Today we have assembled here to discuss about leprosy. Our Bapu Mahatma Gandhi passed away on 30th of January 1948. He is known for his love and service towards persons suffering from leprosy. That is why 30th January is observed as anti-leprosy day and today we are conducting SPARSH LEPROSY AWARENESS CAMPAIGN.

Gandhiji kept the leprosy patients in his ashram and cleaned their wounds with his own hands. He proved to the world that leprosy does not spread by touching.....

• **Pledge taken by all Gram Sabha members**

**Sample Pledge:**

Today I affirm in the event of Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom day, that I will take care of any persons found to be having patches on the skin with loss of sensation of touch and pain or visible deformity due to leprosy in my family / neighbourhood / community by guiding him to take full treatment from any government institution near their place of residence.....

**The following detailed IEC activities were undertaken at the National/State level:**

### Mass Media

1. **TV Spots:** In some places Panel discussion was held by State Leprosy Officer and Senior Health Officer (Leprosy) regarding Sparsh Campaign and relayed in Doordarshan for 3 days.
2. **Radio spots:** In few states Radio Jingle, Sparsh Leprosy interview on FM Radio for 3 times in a day for 10 days. Further, in few state Panel discussions was held by State Leprosy Officer and Senior Health Officer (Leprosy) regarding Sparsh Campaign and relayed in All India Radio for 7 days (Karnataka).
3. Leprosy Awareness SMS sent to BSNL Customers.
4. Selfie with leprosy banner, poster, or patient taken and posted it on Face Book page Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign created which has many followers <https://www.facebook.com/Sparsh-Leprosy-Awareness-Campaign-Bharuch-97301163> .....
5. Talk shows: talks, lectures

### Print Media

1. Advertisements in regional newspapers and magazines.
2. Coverage of events, success stories in regional newspapers.
3. Development and supply of brochures, pamphlets, leaflets and flipcharts.
4. Distribution of Handbills in local Govt. Schools and local communities.
5. Banners and Posters were installed on Leprosy awareness in all Private clinics and Public places including Railway station, Bus stand, Markets and near Religious Places.

### Others

1. Skin Care Camps were conducted in 4 Urban

Slum Areas to detect hidden cases in the community.

2. **Street theatre:** Street play by NGOs to create awareness & stigma reduction to village and especially in tribal population area.
3. Sarpanch Sammelan with all Padadhikari was done in the morning of 30th Jan, 2017 in many villages.
4. House to House survey and IEC was done in few villages.
5. Talked about leprosy and distribute pamphlets in local Haat Bazar.

### Activities undertaken in Urban Area

With the support of NGOs, Local Bodies and International Organization are as follows:

1. **Street Play**
2. **Rallies**
3. **Lectures/ speech:**
  - Lectures in OPD's in Govt. Hospital, offices and local Govt. Schools on leprosy awareness. Everyone was instructed to disseminate this information in their family and friends and to examine their family members and friends for any suspect patches. This would insure wide spread of the core leprosy message and also insure that one extra person who fights against leprosy be created.
  - CME, Seminar was conducted on Leprosy in that awareness week and Prizes were given to participants of the poster competition.
  - Essay competition among students, where students wrote essays on leprosy and spoke about stigma reduction.
4. Distribution of Leprosy Themed T-shirts among street Children and underprivileged





Fig 5 (a,b): Banners, march, pledge

- children in day care centres. Leaflets were distributed in all the UHCs, school, Major Markets and Hospitals and Banners displayed in Hospitals. Calendar were printed by displaying to increase awareness (Fig. 5 a, b).
5. Training programme was organized among the members of health team and other volunteers on IEC and identification of persons with suspected symptoms and signs of leprosy.
  6. Impart health education to the community, on facts about Leprosy related discrimination and availability of treatment to the community on routine field visits and its treatment.
  7. Involvement of unreached people such as Software Companies, Industries, Street Children, market places, Construction Sites, park, Beach walkers, Worship Places, Theatres and Malls (Chennai District).
  8. Social media like what's app message group, facebook were used to increase awareness.
  9. Display on various types of vehicle such as Stickers were pasted in local cabs and city buses in urban areas, Jeep was decorated with Leprosy slogans and banners and rallied in and around market and street. (Fig.6 a,b,c)
  10. Community speeches, milking in the community and announcement from the religious places on leprosy awareness. Balloon with leprosy related message distributed, awareness made with play card.
  11. Drum beating with toy dancers, Rangoli





Fig. 6 (a, b, c) : Display of stickers at different sites

(Kolam) and competition conducted for Ladies, folk show, put up stall at Krishak Swahid Khetra to increase awareness.

12. In Thaipooasam festival, Leprosy awareness speech was given to more than 50000 people (Tamil Nadu).
13. Involvement and association of various stakeholders such as Lions club, Rotary Club, Indian Medical Association, IADVL (Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venerologists and Leprologists).

#### Monitoring of Sparsh Campaign

- ✧ Shared guidelines and key messages through this group.
- ✧ Activities are monitored to ensure quality (>3000 messages received).
- ✧ Formation of Whatsapp group to communicate and motivate all categories of officials.
- ✧ Supervisory staff in the field monitored the activity for supporting supervision and ensuring quality.

#### Outcome of the campaign

- ✧ It is estimated that the Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign (SLAC) was conducted in around two third of villages.
- ✧ According to the reports received from the states and UTs, 15 states and 4 UTs have conducted Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign (SLAC) on 30.01.2017 in the village

gram sabhas and following fortnight. Out of total districts in the country, 85.21% district and out of total blocks in the country, 82.44% blocks and out of total villages, 56.31% village has been participated in the SLAC.

- ✧ After intervention, there is major shift in understanding about the leprosy disease which will ensure early detection of all leprosy cases and therefore decrease in hidden cases and visible deformity.
- ✧ Further, there is likely decrease in stigma and discrimination attached to leprosy.

#### Additional Benefits of Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign Increased awareness

- ◆ **Sensitization of Political leaders:** The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, called upon the people of the nation towards a collective action to eliminate Leprosy, which is now a 'treatable disease' on the occasion of Anti Leprosy Day on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2017. Honorable Prime Minister also stress upon that although, case detection rate thereafter, marginally reduced, visible deformity at the time of diagnosis has increased. We should leave no stone unturned to reach the last mile but also to work together to eliminate the social stigma attached to the disease.
- ◆ **Decision makers:** Definitely this SLAC campaign definitely influenced the decision makers and will help in spreading the

message against stigma and discrimination against leprosy and to accept the leprosy affected persons into the families and mainstream of the society.

### **Innovative Aspects**

Utilization of existing potential of Panchayat Raj Institution, NGOs, Local Bodies, other stake holders and community themselves for IEC was an innovation and never tried at National Level in Health Sector. This was a huge success with minimum financial implications.

### **Conclusions**

The Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign was a successful campaign which was implemented pan India using available infrastructure with minimum

addition cost. SLAC in NLEP will continue in different formats in time to come. Self reporting is likely to increase in many folds and which will help in reduction the number of visible deformity cases in leprosy and also to halt in community transmission of disease. SLAC along with other initiatives taken under NLEP are likely to achieve vision of leprosy free India in near future.

### **Acknowledgements**

Central Leprosy Division (CLD) acknowledges the support of all the members of Panchayat Raj Institution, NGOs, Local Bodies, other stake holders and community. CLD is also like to acknowledge to all block, district and state level staffs who were participated in Sparsh Campaign.

**How to cite this article :** Kumar A, Roy R and Prasad J (2017). Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaign (SLAC) : An Approach to Create Mass Awareness on Leprosy. *Indian J Lepr.* **89** : 151-160.