

An overview of Leprosy in Nepal

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Worldwide, every year 200,000 new patients are diagnosed and an estimated 5.5 million people are afflicted by the disease.

- **Leprosy:**
- Infectious disease caused by a bacteria.
- Long incubation period.
- Early symptoms often unobtrusive but step by step getting worse.
- First medicine in mid 1940s.
- In 1982, the start of a multidrug treatment
- The disease as such is curable – the killing of the bacteria-
- Problem: damages before proper treatment.

- In Nepal, before the 1950s – no treatment for leprosy.
- But many leprosy affected persons some of them physically very badly damaged.
- Leprosy = the *Maha Rog* (The Big Disease): physically and socially.

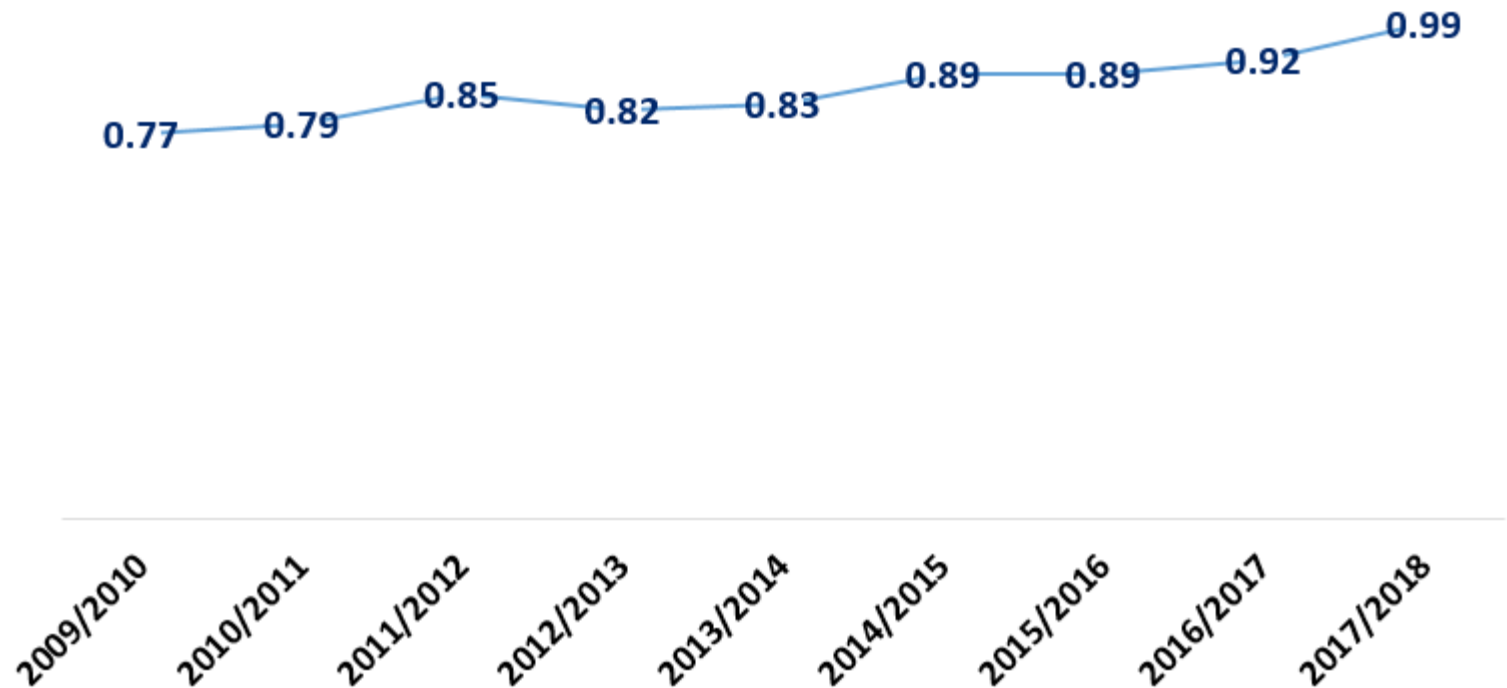
- The arrival of Dapsone was the turning point-
- And with the arrival of MDT in the early 1980s, worldwide the hope of conquering the disease was born.

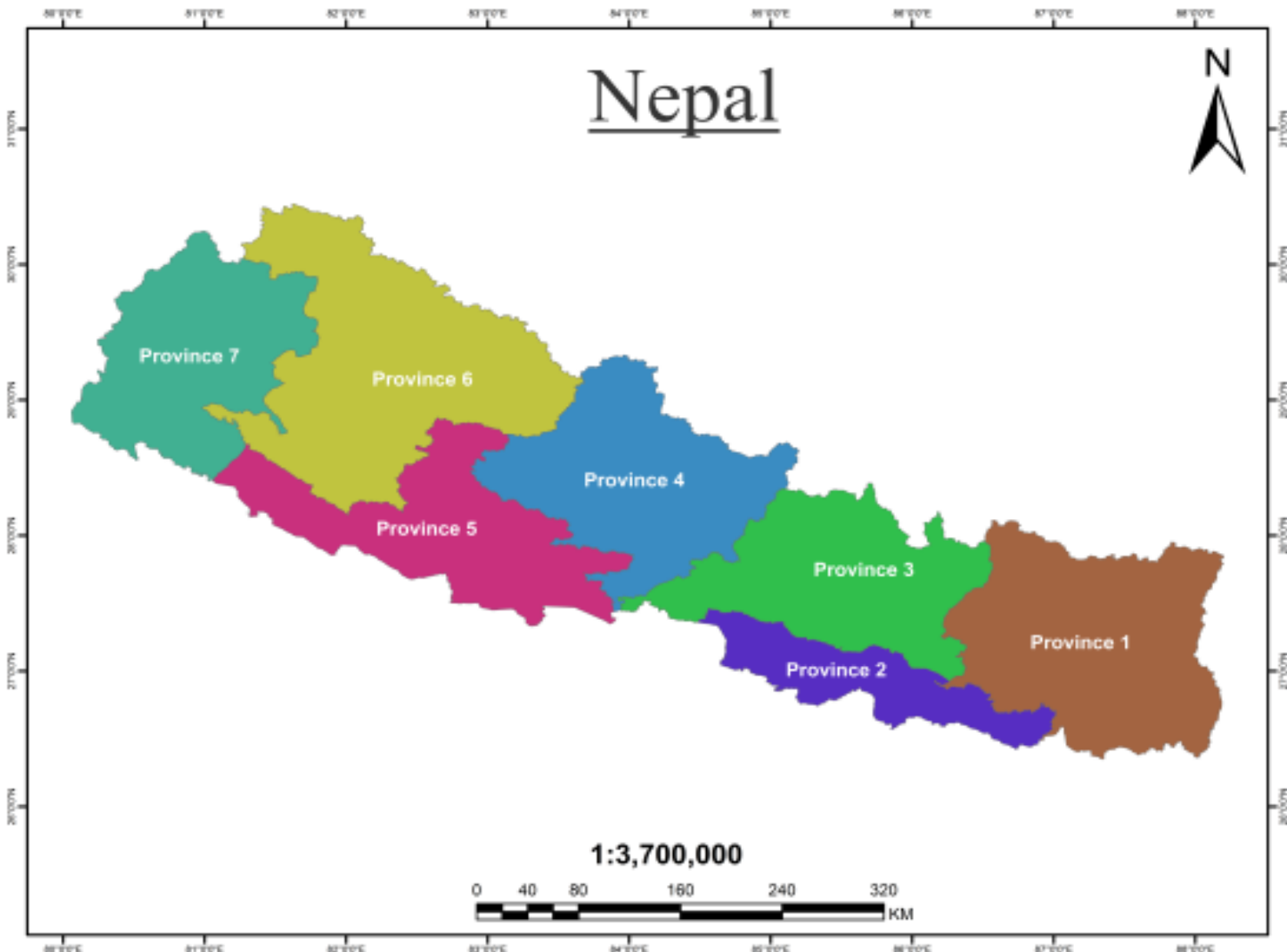
- First step: the point prevalence Elimination goal – less than 1 patient on leprosy treatment per 10.000 population.
- Expectations that after that the disease would die out.

- In Nepal the goal was reached in late 2009, proclaimed in early 2010, with a registered point prevalence of 0.77/10,000 population.
- Instead there has been a slow but steady increase: the latest official figure is 0.99/10,000.
- The number of New Cases registered in the last fiscal year was: 3.300.

- Figure 1 from Parajuli *et al.*

PREVALENCE RATE /10,000





INF's leprosy work.

- Since its arrival in Nepal in the early 1950s, INF has been involved in leprosy work. First in Leprosy care, and since the start of the National Leprosy Programme in 1974, also in leprosy control work.

Two sides to INF's work:

- to care for the patients: medically, spiritually, and socially.
- to stem the transmissions of the disease

Stigma and Discrimination

Leprosy was feared for the physical deterioration; for the possibility of transmissions from one person to another; but also because it was seen as a curse by the gods – an earned condition according to the law of Karma, i.e. because of bad/wrong deeds in this life or in an earlier. The persons affected were perceived as spiritually polluted and polluting – unclean! A person to avoid.

- In our days, only in the most extreme cases are patients excommunicated, but some chose to move away temporarily, during the treatment period, to save the family from the shame of having leprosy in the family.
- Leprosy is still a condition which influences the social status of family members, marriage possibilities, work opportunities etc.
- And, when a temporary move away is not possible – silence and concealment is a common strategy to avoid social stigma and discrimination.