

# What is a 'Self-help Group'?

**Self-help groups are the key to the success of the Hill Tracts project. But what are they and what do they achieve?**

**United we stand!** Disabled people are generally shunned by their communities and considered unable to contribute to their community. By joining a self-help group they immediately find companionship, support and the courage to stand up for their rights.

**Together we make a difference!** Opening a group bank account with the support of TLM is a huge step forward and enables the group to pool what little money they have and use it to start small enterprises such as buying a cow or a sewing machine. This not only provides members with income but also dignity and value in their community.

**A little goes a long way!** If a group shows it can use money wisely and effectively TLM can help them apply for government grants to buy, for example, another cow or to install a latrine. Self-help groups can become key contributors to their whole community.

**An army of volunteers!** Once people see how a self-help group can change their lives they become willing ambassadors not just for the self-help group but for The Leprosy Mission. With TLM supervision they take responsibility for detecting new cases of leprosy ('house to house' surveys) and bringing people for treatment. They promote leprosy awareness and look for disabled people who could join their group and receive support.

**A network of over 1000 self-help groups is the key to reaching our goal of leprosy elimination in the Chittagong Hill Tracts within three years.**



Self help group members in the slums of Chittagong city

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## Transforming lives in the **Chittagong Hill Tracts** of Bangladesh



Children at a leprosy awareness street play in the slums of Chittagong City

**The East of England Project**  
Our aim: leprosy elimination within three years



# Parach Chakma

Parach (pronounced Parosh) is the Project Manager for the Chittagong Hill Tracts project and it could not be in better hands. He was diagnosed with leprosy in 2006 and still suffers from leprosy reaction, hence he has a slightly swollen face. He caught leprosy many years earlier but was misdiagnosed several times by local doctors. In 2006 he saw a TLM poster showing leprosy symptoms and immediately went to his local TLM clinic for help. He has been left with slightly clawed hands.

Parach is also a member of one of the Hill Tribes and thus finds it far easier to meet them and earn their trust than a non-tribal Bangladeshi. His personal testimony speaks volumes. He is the highest positioned leprosy-affected person working for TLM in Bangladesh.

His passion for the Hill Tribes and his personal witness are obvious and Parach would value your prayers as he leads over 100 new staff and volunteers.



# The Chittagong Hill Tracts Project

## Our aim: leprosy elimination within three years



TLM volunteers committed to eliminating leprosy in Chittagong

The Chittagong Hill Tracts area consists of 13 non-Bangladeshi tribal peoples who were forcibly moved from their lands elsewhere in Bangladesh to the Hill Tracts after independence. Within the vast area of the Hill Tracts there are only 14 towns, each with one government doctor (that's one doctor per 110,000 people) and very few roads. The vast majority of people live in extreme poverty in remote, almost inaccessible villages. It is little wonder that leprosy flourishes.

TLM is embarking on an ambitious three-year plan to achieve leprosy elimination. It will involve over a hundred newly recruited and trained staff, half of whom will work in the deep jungle, plus an additional 1000 volunteers. The aim is leprosy elimination (a new case detection rate of less than 1 per 10,000 in the population) within three years.

**Phase One** Starts in June 2009 and aims to increase leprosy awareness by visiting every school to speak to pupils and teachers, holding leprosy awareness street plays in towns, starting poster campaigns and broadcasting from portable PA systems to spread the message that leprosy is curable. Government workers and charity staff will be trained to recognise leprosy symptoms and to direct people to TLM. Hundreds of volunteers will be recruited. **The goal is that one person from every other household, however rural, will come to a leprosy awareness meeting and will then bring people quickly for treatment before they infect others and develop disabilities.**

**Phase Two** The main thrust of year two will be a 'house to house' survey with every dwelling, however isolated, being visited. This will identify leprosy and disabled people who would benefit from a self help group. It will also be an opportunity to identify the training needs and the help required to get the groups started. **The goal is to start 1000 self help groups and reach all disabled people living in the Hill Tracts and through positive action reduce stigma and shame, thus encouraging early leprosy treatment.**

**Phase Three** The final phase will include starting a vocational training department to help self-help group members learn skills with which to support themselves. TLM will help the groups open bank accounts and get funding for development projects such as sanitation and housing. The aim is to increase members' independence and dignity and the living conditions for the whole community. This in turn will improve health and reduce leprosy prevalence. **The ultimate goal is diagnosis and treatment before disability occurs and before the infection is passed on. The result will be a dramatic reduction in new cases of leprosy and disability related stigma.**



## The Chittagong Hill Tracts A brief comparison

The Hill Tracts are very similar to the combined area of the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex.

Size:

Hill Tracts: 13,180 sq km

Norfolk/ Suffolk/ Essex: 12,830 sq km

Population:

Hill Tracts: 1.5 million

Norfolk/ Suffolk/ Essex: 2.9 million

Kilometres of paved roads:

Hill Tracts: 1900 km

Norfolk/ Suffolk/ Essex: 21,000 km

Average Age:

Hill Tracts: 23

Norfolk/ Suffolk/ Essex: 40

Average annual income per person:

Hill Tracts: £600\*

UK: £25,000

\*Extreme poverty is actually measured in rice

Country map and facts courtesy of the CIA World Fact Book and correct as of April 2009