Modernising the Fight Against Leprosy – Pilot on Schools Debates

1. German Leprosy and TB Relief Association, Nigeria
Introduction

• Despite achieving the WHO elimination target at national level since 1998, the Nigerian national TB and leprosy control programme continues to notify over 3,000 new leprosy cases every year.

• This amounts to a case detection rate of 1.8 per 100,000 population.
Introduction (contd.)

• About 20% of these cases have visible deformities at diagnosis and a child proportion of 8%.

• This means that over two hundred children (0-14 years) are affected by leprosy in this cohort.

• Information obtained from many patients suggests that public awareness on essentials of leprosy is still inadequate.
Introduction (contd.)

• GLRA decided that bold new initiatives were required to break new grounds in improving public awareness on leprosy.

• Engaging young people through schools debates was one of these novel approaches.
Methods

- Sensitization visits were made to schools during which baseline data on students’ knowledge of leprosy were collected using questionnaires.

- Debates were conducted in 12 randomly selected secondary schools with students and teachers as the audience.

- The best 3 schools in the debates participated in a quiz competition and a winner emerged.
Methods (contd.)

• Leprosy experts used the opportunity to dispel misconceptions and provide accurate information on the disease and its control.

• Post-intervention assessment of students’ knowledge of leprosy was conducted using questionnaires.
Results

• The proportion of students that believed that leprosy patients under treatment would not readily infect others increased from 51% to 76% by the end of the competition.

• Only 7% of the students knew that leprosy is curable compared to 78% post-intervention.
Results

• This suggests a positive change in students’ knowledge

• It is believed that as the message is spread, it will help in fighting stigma as well as contribute to increased case finding.
Conclusion

• Engaging the youth through schools debate/quiz appears to be a promising approach to improving awareness on leprosy among school children

• This, it is believed has potentials to contribute to greater public awareness.