



INTRODUCTION

- Podoconiosis (or simply podo) is a form of non-filarial elephantiasis; swelling of the lower leg triggered by prolonged exposure to irritant minerals in red clay soils. There is no infectious or contagious agent: no parasite, no bacterium, and no virus is involved. Podo was classified as a neglected tropical disease by the World Health Organization in 2011.
- It is estimated that 1.5 million people live with podo in Ethiopia, and podo is endemic in 345 districts of the country (1).
- Affected individuals are often excluded from school, church, mosque, idirs, weddings, and funerals. It is difficult for patients and their relatives to find marriage partners (2).
- Despite podo's great public health importance, few control initiatives addressing it exist.
- International Orthodox Christian Charities' (IOCC) field experience in Ethiopia demonstrates the effectiveness of simple, inexpensive lymphedema management for podo.
- Lymphedema morbidity management and disability prevention (LMMDP) services for podo comprise foot hygiene, wound care, foot care, bandaging, footwear and socks, and exercise and treatment for acute attacks.
- IOCC, in collaboration with the Ethiopian government, has been providing LMMDP services and developing the capacity of government health professionals, community members, and religious leaders in Amhara Region since 2009.

RESULTS

Community Involvement and Sustainability

- The program seeks to integrate lymphedema morbidity management and disability prevention (LMMDP) for podo into government healthcare services.
- IOCC is building the capacity of health professionals through training and continued technical support provided by project staff.
- Treatment participants are investing in themselves, showing health-seeking behaviors, and are now purchasing some of their own treatment supplies.
- Community leaders and the patient-led groups mobilize communities on the uptake and utilization of podo control and treatment services and reinforce treatment protocol, including adherence to shoe-wearing and seeking treatment early.
- Government health centers provide sustainable education and medical support to people with lymphedema.
- Access to affordable medical services is being provided by government health centers.
- IOCC has further increased the government's capacity to provide appropriate services to people with lymphedema.
- Treatment supplies, including soap, Vaseline, bandages, and custom-made shoes have been made available at health centers.
- Water-storage capacity has been increased at selected government health centers, as water is essential for treatment of the disease.
- Government schools are the structures being used to provide early disease-prevention messages to schoolchildren.
- "Stop-Podo" clubs have been established at schools to facilitate the continuation of prevention education in endemic communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To ensure uninterrupted access to podo treatment services, continued technical support and training should be provided to government health professionals.
- Demand creation for treatment should be backed by community engagement, through the sustained efforts of patient-led groups and community leaders.
- At the community level, it is essential that people with podo and household members actively engage in their own treatment/self-care and invest in disease prevention.
- Community conversations, patient-led groups, and community leaders provide an avenue for increased awareness of podo's causes and prevention methods. They also ensure that the knowledge will spread organically in the future with little input from external sources.
- At the community level, health-extension workers should take the lead in prevention and treatment follow-up.
- It is important that the capacity of local networks and local communities is built up to provide longer-term disease prevention and treatment.
- Achieving sustainability means shifting more responsibility toward local and community-based systems.

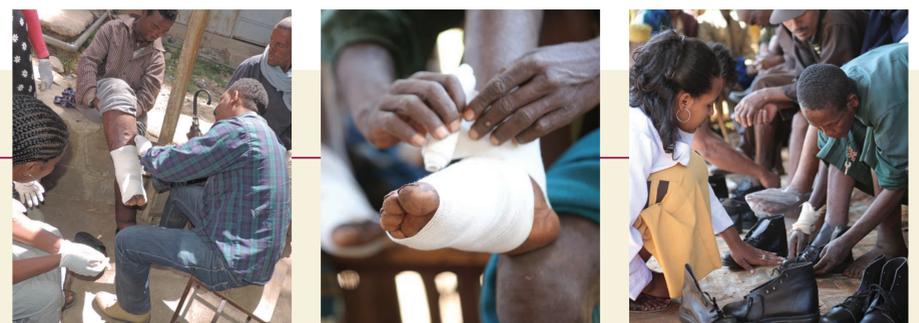
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IOCC extends its appreciation and thanks to the following:

- The Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health and the Amhara Regional Bureaus of Health, Labor and Social Affairs; Education; and Finance and Economy.
- The National Podoconiosis Action Network and local communities in project target areas.
- Financial support provided by BIG Lottery, END Fund, IOCC private donors, Izumi Foundation, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, IOCC's Katherine Valone Trust St. Photini Water Program, TOMS Shoes, and University of Sussex.
- In-kind support provided by TOMS Shoes and Latter Day Saints Charities.

INTERVENTION & RESPONSE

- IOCC, in partnership with the Federal Government Ministry of Health and Regional Health Bureaus, has been implementing a podo prevention and treatment program with a focus on LMMDP in more than 42 districts/ woredas of Amhara Region. The program does the following:
 - Fosters partnerships and empowers government health centers, the private sector, local communities, and people with podo.
 - Provides awareness education in endemic communities through community conversations, mass gatherings, schools, and national workshops.
 - Provides treatment supplies: specifically, soap, Vaseline, bandages, washing basins, and custom-made shoes.
 - Provides capacity-building training for health professionals, patient-led groups, and community leaders.
 - Provides support to local communities on establishing community-level patient-led groups, district associations, and zonal federations.
 - Provides hygiene education and distributes shoes for schoolchildren to prevent podo.



Outputs

- So far, more than 54,000 people with podo have benefitted from IOCC's LMMDP services.
- Over 500 health workers have been trained on LMMDP.
- Nearly 700,000 schoolchildren have received foot-hygiene education and shoes.
- 18,900 community participants have taken part in "community conversations" to increase knowledge about the disease.
- 39 patient associations (PAs) have been established.
- More than 35 government health centers are now offering podo LMMDP services in Amhara Region, a proven sustainable mechanism for health-service expansion in hard-to-reach areas of the country.

Outcome

- IOCC has worked with the Federal Ministry of Health to create an environment conducive to expanding LMMDP services in the country, including incorporating podo response into the country's Neglected Tropical Diseases Master Plan.
- IOCC is engaged in building the capacity of the healthcare systems by training government health workers on lymphedema management and community-level awareness raising.

