

Challenges and Progress in Leprosy Eradication

Marketing intelligence system provides information about customer problems, competitor strengths, etc. to a marketer to make better marketing decisions

According to WHO, 'Elimination of leprosy means reduction of patients to one case per 10,000 people where as eradication means the total absence of the disease'. India has reached the status of 'leprosy elimination country' as per WHO standards in spite of it once contributed for nearly 50% of cases worldwide. India has to go a long way to eradicate leprosy from the land.

16% countries share 95% of leprosy patients. Only 16 million patients have been cured till now in the last three decades. The number of cases increased slightly during 2011-12. Why is it so difficult to eradicate leprosy?

The **marketing intelligence system** is developed through constant interactions with customers, dealers and suppliers, and information available from trade journals and other such publications. In addition, constant monitoring of competitors and their strategies also helps in the development of the marketing intelligence system.

The reasons for the existence of leprosy

- **Difficulty in Early detection:** Leprosy takes 3-5 years between its onset and detection. In few cases the incubation takes 20 years
- **Possibility of misdiagnose as skin diseases:** Leprosy appears like a skin disorder because of its scaly patches on the body. The misdiagnose still delays the treatment
- **Less qualified doctors:** Majority of doctors lack skill to identify the leprosy at early stage since medical colleges do not store infected skin smears for further studies
- **Cultivation of leprosy-causing bacterium is not feasible in laboratory:** Since the bacterium cannot be cultivated in 'vivo(lab)' except on mice, armadillos and humans; it is difficult to experiment in laboratories
- **Operational constraints:** Drug deliveries, availability of hospitals, lab facilities etc. are the constraints which further delay the diagnosis and the treatment.
- **Majority of countries are focusing more on TB and malaria:** Since Leprosy does not kill patients as fast as diseases like TB and malaria, majority of countries have aggravated efforts to get rid of TB and malaria in the first place.

The efforts in the direction of eradicating leprosy

- **Multi-drug therapy (MDT):** World Health Organization (WHO) recommended a combination of drugs as MDT for the eradication of leprosy. These drugs should never be used as monotherapy for eradication of leprosy.
- **New research:** A team of Indian and German scientists have identified a genetic clue among Indian patients for early diagnosis. The present research can help to initiate early treatment
- **New Blood Test for Early Detection:** Brazil, which has the second largest number of leprosy patients, developed a new blood test to diagnose the leprosy in just ten minutes. After product testing at a larger scale it can revolutionize leprosy diagnose in the world.
- **International Leprosy Congress (ILC) efforts:** ILC, Belgium has allocated \$8m for additional research to attack the disease and provide early eradication.

Still more efforts are needed to completely eradicate leprosy on the globe.

Topic	Course
Marketing intelligence system: Marketing research, MKIS, and demand forecasting: Unit 7.5	Marketing management

Source: A.A.K (2013), *Why is it hard to eradicate leprosy?*, *The Economist*, Nov, 11, 2013