



People with Disabilities (PWDs) Think Tank Seminar on **ERADICATION OF POLIO IN PAKISTAN**

Organized by: DPI Pakistan / Estanara / ARCP

Venue: KMC Officers Club, KMC Sports Complex, Karachi

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Pakistan is one of only three countries in the world where the polio virus is still endemic.

Dr. Nima Saeed Abid, the acting WHO chief in Pakistan, said health workers have not been able to immunize some 240,000 children who have missed UN-backed vaccinations against polio because of security concerns in Pakistan's tribal regions in the North and South Waziristan regions – strongholds for Taliban militants bordering Afghanistan since July 2012. Pakistan is one of the few remaining countries, along with Afghanistan and Nigeria, where polio is rampant. As many as 58 cases were reported in Pakistan in 2012, down from 198 in 2011.

The true extent of Pakistan's polio problem is difficult to measure. In the absence of a credible monitoring and reporting mechanism, many cases may be going unreported. Available data suggests a strong connection between peace and polio. Its incidence is low in the relatively peaceful areas in Punjab and Sindh and high in restive K-P, Fata and Balochistan. Of the 198 cases recorded in 2011, a staggering 188 were from violence-plagued areas, including Balochistan (73), Fata (59), K-P (23) and Sindh (33). Similarly, 55 of the total 58 cases in 2012 were reported from Balochistan (four), Fata (20), K-P (27) and Sindh (four). The biggest challenge in containing the poliovirus is being faced in K-P and Fata. The World Health Organization says that children in North and South Waziristan agencies have not been immunized since July 2012. According to data provided by K-P's Expanded Program on Immunization, just five cases were recorded in 2005. A spike in cases started emerging with the rise in violence in 2006. The trend continues to date.

Polio in Pakistan

The annual incidence of polio in Pakistan, which was estimated to be more than 20,000 cases a year in early 1990's, decreased to around 30 cases in 2005. It is hard to believe today but just a few years ago Pakistan was on the verge of polio eradication. Unfortunately, the number of cases increased to a 15 year record high of 198 in 2011.

Key Challenges to Polio Eradication in Pakistan

- limited oversight and accountability at the District and Union Council levels
- access problems due to insecurity particularly in KP and FATA
- failure to identify and focus on underserved population and mobile groups
- operational and planning challenges to deliver vaccination door-to-door to more than 38 million children several times a year and achieving high coverage at UC level

- overall campaign fatigue in public domain, rumors and negative perception of oral polio vaccine in some communities

Opportunity

Polio vaccination coverage has remained consistently low over the years in some areas of Pakistan, especially the towns of Karachi (Gadap, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Baldia & Flood Effectuated Area of Interior Sindh), Balochistan (Quetta, Pishin, and Killah Abdullah) and FATA.

These have turned into reservoirs where the polio virus breeds freely and spreads all over the country. Such areas have been labeled as 'high-risk'. 70% of all polio cases in Pakistan are attributed to them. Defeating polio there means ending Polio almost all over Pakistan!

Eradicating Polio in Pakistan

The Government and Polio Eradication Initiative partners reviewed approaches used in the program. The National Emergency Action Plan and its augmentation endorsed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan in November of 2011 calls for:

- Achieving full oversight, ownership, and accountability for polio program performance at each administrative level
- Ensuring consistent access to children in security compromised areas
- Ensuring that all children are immunized in the "high-risk" areas
- Ensuring adequate preparations for the anti-polio campaigns and deferring dates in case of inadequate preparations

Recommendations from DPOs and Think Tank Group

1. Policy and implementation framework to support Polio Eradication by 2020.
2. Budget must be allocate by the Government for the awareness campaign for polio, advocacy and awareness Campaigns for Citizens in all four provincial languages in Social, Print and Electronic Media.
3. Joint ventures with Pakistani DPOs and International Aid Agencies for Door to door Polio Awareness campaign in less privileged and rural communities.
4. Recruitment of Polio Affected Mobile Persons in the Polio Eradication Campaign and incentive to be given to them according to the government policy.
5. Ladies victims of Polio should be trained as LHWs for community based child polio eradication campaign.
6. DPOs to be made core part of the team in Polio Eradication Campaigns.