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IMMUNIZATION AS A DOORWAY

Fighting Polio in three endemic countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria

Immunization interventions are a natural entry point and driver to scaling up maternal and child health actions and provide broader health services closer to the people who need them most. This can be delivered through a continuum of health care whereby we can reach the unreached, the most vulnerable groups and communities beyond the formal health care system.

Afghanistan



Dr. Rahmullah/Afghan Red Crescent Society

ISSUE

- 43 per cent of the population has no or very poor access to primary health care, including immunization, and the percentage is estimated to be as high as 70 per cent in areas of conflict in the south.
- Persistent Wild Poliovirus transmission is prevalent in 13 districts in the south of the country.

HOW WE HELP

- Afghanistan Red Crescent Society provides routine immunization as part of its long term health programmes, such as the maternal and child health programme and through 44 basic health care clinics and 15 mobile health teams.
- In 2012, more than 280,000 children have been vaccinated through the clinics and teams.
- In eastern Afghanistan, near the borders of remote tribal areas, 860 volunteers were involved in campaigns providing Polio drops to almost 250,000 children.
- Red Crescent activities in the high risk Polio areas include the mobile health teams in Kandahar and Helmand provinces.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- The Red Crescent mobile health teams and decentralized branches can provide vaccination services in areas which are difficult to access, particularly in the eastern and southern parts of the country, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and its partners, UNICEF and WHO.
- Enhance our role in monitoring and supervision to immunization teams and social mobilization initiatives through cluster supervisor and volunteer team members in high risk areas.

Pakistan



ISSUE

- Immunization coverage in Pakistan has stagnated. The proportion of children fully immunized is approximately 43 to 62 per cent (depending on the survey and year).
- Parents refusals, migration, difficult flood-prone zones, and unrest in some border areas, are challenging Polio efforts.

HOW WE HELP

- Immunization is embedded in mother and child health interventions provided at the Pakistan Red Crescent supported 110 health facilities. These facilities comprise tertiary care hospitals, rural health centres, basic and mobile health units.
- Red Crescent health facilities provide routine vaccination services and volunteers are engaged in community mobilization interventions to increase public trust and address refusal cases.
- In 2012, Pakistan Red Crescent Society completed an 18-month Polio social mobilization activity in high risk areas in Sindh and Baluchistan provinces. Almost 19,000 children were vaccinated and 46,000 households engaged through extensive outreach interventions.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Increase Red Crescent's engagement in Polio programmes in identified high risk areas in Baluchistan and Sindh provinces.
- Support routine vaccination services as part of a health care package within a strengthened primary health care approach – especially through community outreach services.
- Increase coordination with health authorities and partners to strengthen a comprehensive Polio communication and social mobilization intervention to overcome resistance and increase public demand for immunization.

Nigeria



Banoti/Matasha-Carpenter/IFRC

ISSUE

- The majority of children with Polio come from poor families, live in remote, rural settlements in border areas between districts, have not been visited by vaccinator teams or their parents have refused the vaccine. According to recent data, 18 per cent of missed children were due to refusals.
- The fight against Polio faces stiff internal opposition. Recent attacks against Polio workers have undermined the successes achieved so far.

HOW WE HELP

- The Nigeria Red Cross Society, in close coordination with the Government of Nigeria, UNICEF and WHO, is actively working towards strengthening community based health action with innovative communication and social mobilization approaches.
- 2,000 Nigerian Red Cross volunteers are currently active in 11 high risk states, strengthening the link between communities, health facilities and immunization services.
- As mobilizers based within their own communities, the volunteers effectively extend health services beyond health facilities through culturally appropriate, cost-effective and sustainable methods right down to the household level.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Expand Nigeria Red Cross immunization interventions nationwide with an emphasis on remote areas and as part of a wider maternal and child health programming, focusing on routine immunization, malaria, respiratory tract infections and diarrhoea prevention and management.
- Improve community based surveillance.
- Increase the engagement of local traditional and religious leaders.



ISSUE

- 17 per cent of deaths among children under five (1.5 million per year) is attributed to vaccine preventable diseases.
- Failure to eradicate Polio in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria, could result in up to 200,000 new cases every year, within 10 years, globally.

HOW WE HELP

- The International Federation of the Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies (IFRC) has broad social and community mobilization experience in supporting national and sub national immunization interventions.
- Volunteers extend health services, including immunizations, beyond the health facilities doors through innovative and relevant operational models to reach the most marginalized communities.
- The Red Cross Red Crescent's community based health and first aid approach is one way in which immunization interventions are integrated into wider maternal, newborn and child health interventions.
- We promote sanitation and hygiene practices as a key component to improving hygiene habits and to preventing Polio and other diseases.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Strengthen routine immunization and build on the well-established success of large-scale vaccination campaigns to ensure equal access to a combination of health services at community level.
- Deliver comprehensive package of interventions which includes vaccinations, improved access to water and sanitation services, and hygiene promotion.
- Value and equip more volunteers and community health workers with knowledge and awareness of the needs and the possibilities for improving the health of women and children in their communities.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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