



## Importance of Immunization in Flood Hit Areas

### Overview of Devastation in Floods Hit Areas

Heavy monsoon rains started to hit Pakistan from 22 July 2010, caused flash floods in several parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Sindh province. These floods have caused huge devastation; hundreds of villages have been swept away. Death toll has risen to more than 1500 people, at least 1.2 million homes have been damaged and an estimated over 17.2 million people have been affected by the floods. Floods have caused widespread damage to public infrastructure, with roads submerged and tens of bridges swept away, many hospitals and an estimated 7,173 schools are severely damaged. Power and communication lines are down in many areas. The economic cost is also huge. Thousands acres of agricultural land has been flooded, at least 3.2 million hectares of standing crops have been damaged and at least 200,000 livestock animals have been lost<sup>1</sup>.

According to local and international aid workers there is a real danger that diseases will develop very rapidly in the flood affected areas because the drinking water has been polluted by dying animals, livestock and human sewage. The World Food Program says that food supplies are becoming a serious issue in many parts of the flooded area.<sup>2</sup> There is indeed a very serious and shared risk assessed by the different humanitarian agencies working in Pakistan and a second wave of deaths induced by the floods under the shape of water-borne diseases, diarrhea-related problems is expected.<sup>3</sup> In some parts of the mountainous region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan flash floods have washed away valley roads and bridges. People are cut-off and helicopters are the only mean to distribute goods and food to the affected people.<sup>4</sup> As much as 50 percent of the country has been inundated, causing widespread loss of crops. In some areas, 80 percent of farm livestock reportedly has been lost.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://undp.org.pk/flood-in-pakistan.html>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/Massive-Evacuation-Continues-as-Pakistan-Floods-Spread-South-100111059.html>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/Aid-Agencies-Alarmed-at-Scale-Of-Pakistan-Flooding--100632789.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.geo.tv/8-26-2010/70526.htm>

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

## Health Crisis in Flood Hit Areas

Pakistani and U.N. officials say that deadly waterborne and a number of other infectious diseases are on the rise among victims of the country's worst floods in history.<sup>6</sup>

Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, Prime Minister of Pakistan told in a meeting convened to review health situation on Tuesday, August 24, 2010 that:

*"It has damaged more than 200 health facilities. About 35,000 lady health workers, out of a total of 100,000 throughout the country, have been displaced. Doctors, nurses, lady health visitors and paramedical staff have also been dislocated in the affected areas. There are, more than , 500,000 pregnant women who are at risk because of unsafe, unhygienic environment Acute respiratory infections, skin diseases and malnutrition are spreading in the affected areas The magnitude of the destruction due to these floods is not only colossal but multi dimensional".*

Until August 27, 2010; about 515696 cases of acute watery diarrhea, 708677 cases of skin diseases and 531660 of acute respiratory infection have been reported in flood-affected provinces. More than 3.8 million patient consultations have been conducted in flood-affected provinces since 29 July.<sup>8</sup> The stagnant water and remains of dead animals pose health hazard to more than 20 million flood survivors. United Nations issued a warning that over 3.5 million children risk contracting cholera and malaria because of unhygienic environment in relief camps established by the government and humanitarian groups.

## Importance of Immunization in Flood Hit Areas

Emergency Immunization campaign is required to vaccinate pregnant mothers and children against diseases like measles, polio, hepatitis and other water born diseases. Pakistani health officials fear that more than 85,000 babies expected to be born in the country's flood-affected areas over the next six months will be malnourished because of scarce food supply.<sup>9</sup> There is also a serious threat of polio and measles outbreak amongst newborns.

The Ministry of Health in collaboration with the partners (UNICEF and WHO) immediately initiated an emergency response to vaccinate mothers and children against vaccine preventable diseases especially measles and vitamin A supplement. The devastation of basic health units in rural areas had made it difficult to address the challenge. However,

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/Pakistani-UN-Officials-Report-Rise-in-Infectious-Disease-Due-to-Flood-101390989.html>

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> See Epidemiological Bulletin Flood Response Pakistan: MoH and WHO

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Islamabad/20-Aug-2010/Floods-newborns-likely-to-be-malnourished>

mobile units had been set up and health workers in those areas had been directed to provide free vitamin tablets to women in particular as well as vaccinate babies against polio.<sup>10</sup>

To cater the need for remaining population of affected districts, a special follow-up mass measles and polio vaccination will be convening soon after recession of water in the flood affected districts. All children less than 5 years in 77 flood affected districts will be vaccinated for Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) and children (6-59 months old) will receive measles vaccination in addition to covering due and defaulters up to 2 years of age. All pregnant women will also be received TT vaccination

The preparations are underway to complete vaccination in 40 worst affected districts by the end of September the remaining 37 districts will be reached by mid November. All remaining districts and towns will be reached only with measles vaccine by March 2011.<sup>11</sup>

### **Role of Parliamentarians in promoting Immunization in Flood Hit Areas**

Parliamentarians as an elected representative of the public can help the flood affected people in the following ways:

- Organize the constituents to respond actively in immunization campaigns.
- Coordinate with District Health Officers of the areas to oversee that all target women and children have been vaccinated
- Monitor the effectiveness and progress of EPI in flood hit areas and raise any concerns with the local administration or in the legislatures.
- Liaise with the electronic and print media in advertising the importance of immunization campaign in flood hit areas.
- Highlight the tragic and fatal impact of diseases to their constituents especially in flood hit areas in their private conversations, raising the matter in their public speeches, holding press conferences.
- Ensure that political influences don't hamper the day to day activities of the EPI teams especially those who are in the field.
- Work in coordination with the NADRA to issue an immunization card to the vaccinated children
- Highlight administrative lapses, lethargy and lack of effectiveness in the local administration about immunization program in the flood affected areas and demand improvements.
- Draw the attention of the standing committees on health in their respective legislature to the issues and persuade the committee to exercise an active oversight of the immunization campaigns in the flood-hit areas.

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<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup> Information Communication Officer, UNICEF Pakistan

## **Role of Civil Society in promoting Immunization in Flood Hit Areas**

- Civil society representatives should liaise with the Parliamentarians and the media to facilitate the people of flood hit areas to participate in immunization campaign.
- They should work in close coordination with the media and the Parliamentarians to dispel the negative perception about the immunization campaign.
- They should identify the areas which are neglected by outreaching teams of the vaccinators.
- They should highlight the loopholes during the campaign for instance hygienic situation at the immunization camps, quality of vaccines, response of the households and overall coverage ratio of vaccination teams in the entire flood hit area.
- They should play their role in mobilizing the donors and non government organizations to extend their support for flood affected areas.

## **Role of Media in promoting Immunization in Flood Hit Areas**

- The prime contribution of media for flood emergency response is the FREE OF COST dissemination of Health and Hygiene Messages with special emphasis on the importance of Immunization.
  - Media should highlight the issues raised during immunization campaigns of flood affected areas in a neutral and credible way.
  - They should work in liaison with the Parliamentarians and the civil society in highlighting and mobilizing the international and national organizations to extend their support to the flood affected areas.
  - They should advertise the need of any particular medicine promptly to maintain the balance between supply and demand.
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