

National Immunisation Day (NID)

Polio Eradication in Bangladesh

by Shoeib Shazzad Khan

The Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI) has been conducted throughout the country by the Government of Bangladesh in assistance with NGOs and other UN organisations to combat six deadly child diseases with the view to reducing child mortality and ensuring child health in the country.

This EPI campaign has already achieved remarkable success, although it has to go a long way to reach its desired goal. As a part of this campaign the National Immunisation Day (NID) programme has been taken up to fully eliminate polio from the country. As per the programme the NIDs have been planned to conduct in 1995, 1996 and 1997 throughout the country with two rounds each year at an interval of one month. As many as nineteen million children will be covered under this three-year NID programme.

It was in May 1988 when the World Health Assembly brought forth the resolution appealing to the world to eradicate poliomyelitis by the year 2000. The key strategies recommended for the purpose of polio eradication are: to maintain high coverage with oral polio vaccine (OPV), to improve surveillance systems to detect and investigate polio cases, and to conduct supplementary immunisation. The supplementary immunisation means the intake of two extra doses of OPV at an interval of one month by all the children up to five years of age — no matter whether they have already received polio vaccine.

This supplementary immunisation is implemented in three ways: 1) outbreak or case response in the areas where polio has been reported, 2) mopping-up in the identified high risk population, and 3) observance of National Immunisation Day (NID) for some years to administer the supplementary immunisation by giving two doses of extra OPV to the children up to five years.

Since this formidable programme of polio eradication taken up by the world body an outstanding progress has been made towards acquiring its goal. A formal declaration of polio eradication from the western hemisphere was made in 1994 — the most inspiring is that not a single case of polio caused by wild polio virus has occurred in the Americas since 1991. In other parts of the world, considerable progress has been taken place in polio eradication. Apart from routine vaccination against polio which reached its pinnacle of greater than 80 per cent world-wide in the 1990s, the number of countries supplementing National Immunisation Days (NIDs) for the greater success in polio eradication programme has conspicuously raised from 18 countries in 1992 to 63 in 1995.

After the introduction of NIDs, the number of countries reported zero case of polio raised to 141 in 1993. The instance of zero case in American region alone portrays the potential feasibility of making world polio-free through NIDs. In Asian countries, Cambodia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Philippines and Vietnam have already conducted NIDs. In the Southeast Asian region, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Thailand started conducting NIDs since 1994-95.

Polio is one of the deadly diseases which is causing child mortality in this region including Bangladesh. Still now polio is considered to be a public health problem in the entire subcontinent. More than 70 per cent of polio cases reported worldwide occur in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. In spite of current wide vaccination coverage, recent crippling cases due to polio surveyed by Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare suggest that approximately 2,000 children of Bangladesh develop poliomyelitis every year — among these children 3 to 5 per cent will die from their acute infection and the rest will remain crippled for life. In the past years, Bangladesh's APP surveillance system has substantially improved. Moreover, the national coverage of polio immunisation level for 12-23-month-old has increased from 69 per cent in 1990 to 88 per cent in 1993. Despite these favourable circumstances polio cases continue to occur at unexpectedly high level in Bangladesh — in 1993 alone the reported cases were 233.

Almost all the countries in world including Bangladesh have employed huge health and economic benefits by moving forward with polio eradication campaign in a very comprehensive and organised

manner. It is worth noting that an estimated amount of over two billion dollars has been saved since the eradication of small pox in the 1970s. Equally, if polio can be eradicated, children will no more suffer from life-long disabilities caused by polio virus. Furthermore, they will no longer require vaccination against polio which will result in the savings of enormous budget for health worldwide. It sounds great to estimate that globally the savings from polio eradication will equal the resources invested within 5-7 years after the polio is eradicated. To achieve this goal, besides routine vaccination, observance of NIDs has remarkable significance and effect.

Although oral polio vaccine is effective under ideal conditions, still three routine doses are not hundred percent effective in preventing polio. Again in the developing coun-



tries such as Bangladesh, protection can not be ensured for hundred percent children with polio vaccine. Thus, even with high vaccination coverage a considerable percentage of children is still remaining un-protected from polio. Against this backdrop it is very important to organise NIDs all over the world, specially in the developing countries, in order to interrupt the transmission of the wild polio virus.

The NIDs are annual events in which comprehensive campaign is carried out to administer two extra doses of OPV on two separate days at the interval of four to six weeks to all young children nationwide up to the age of five years, regardless of their previous vaccination status. Thus NIDs are not the replacement of routine vaccination, but are supplementations to the previous vaccinations. It is very important to note that, although NIDs in effect help provide protection against polio for previously unvaccinated children and for the children who may be unprotected in spite of having

Last year the NIDs were conducted on March 16 and April 16 with the help of 600,000 volunteers. Over eighteen million (94 per cent) children of the country ageing 0-5 years received at least one dose of OPV and over thirteen million (85 per cent) children ageing 1-5 years received Vitamin A supplementation. The number of cases of poliomyelitis reported to EPI during the six months following the NIDs was reduced by 50 per cent in comparison to previous years, distinctly indicating the success of NIDs in the first of three-year programme in interrupting the transmission of

wild polio virus. Innumerable contributions were made by the government, UNICEF, WHO, USAID-BASICS, Rotary Int'l and many other NGOs, let alone thousands of devoted volunteers from all over Bangladesh.

This year the NIDs are going to be conducted on April 16 and May 16 with massive programme. Over seven million dollars has been committed by the government and many other agencies viz. CDC, Atlanta, JICA, Rotary Int'l, UNICEF, USAID-BASICS and WHO. Already over 25 million doses of OPV have been distributed throughout the country. Moreover, 15 million children will be supplemented with Vitamin A capsules. NIDs will be conducted simultaneously throughout Bangladesh in all districts, thanas, municipalities and wards. All target-age children presenting to a vaccinating site are to be vaccinated with oral polio vaccine, regardless of vaccination status or whether or not their parents are registered as residents of that administrative locality. The whole programme is intended to implement simultaneously all over the country on April 16 and May 16, 1996, although, considering local situation, the activities may be completed within a few days on some selected dates within the same week in certain areas.

The Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI) has been conducted throughout the country by the Government of Bangladesh in assistance with NGOs and other UN organisations to combat six deadly child diseases with the view to reducing child mortality and ensuring child health in the country. This EPI campaign has already achieved remarkable success, although it has to go a long way to reach its desired goal. As a part of this campaign the National Immunisation Day (NID) programme has been taken up to fully eliminate polio from the country. As per the programme the NIDs have been planned to conduct in 1995, 1996 and 1997 throughout the country with two rounds each year at an interval of one month. As many as nineteen million children will be covered under this three-year NID programme.

The NIDs will perform four specific activities this year viz. 1) administer oral polio vaccine to under five-year-old children, 2) administer Vitamin A to children ageing over six months to five years, 3) identify 9-12 months children requiring measles vaccine and tell them to come to same site for the next vaccination, and 4) screen pregnant women needing tetanus vaccine and tell them to come to the same site for the next vaccination. It should be noted here that NIDs will be used to 'recruit' unvaccinated and partially vaccinated children into the routine EPI system, so that these children can become fully vaccinated against all EPI diseases.

They advised mothers to avail vaccination facilities when the government workers visited them. The health workers did not go into details of medical facts; they told the key facts mothers should always remember, which would help them in deciding and then acting. Thus approaching the mothers through direct interpersonal contact and teaching them the benefits of immunisation in simple, catchy and short phrases was one of the key factors that contributed to EPI's exemplary success.

Non-interruptive Advocacy:

Advocacy was another important aspect of the social mobilisation process. Local politicians, stars of national and international sports and filmdom were used as mouthpieces to advocate for and to create awareness of EPI and convince the public of the benefits of immunisation. Symbols, flyers, stickers, flags were used to attract attention of the illiterate masses.

Inter-ministerial Collaboration:

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Following Bangladesh's example, Burma, India, Indonesia and Nepal conducted or will conduct NIDs in their respective countries. Thus Bangladesh has established itself as the leading nation in successfully conducting polio eradication for the Southeast Asian region. Furthermore, through NIDs Bangladesh has upheld a good example of its commitment to the rights of the children to free and unrestricted access to health services as evidenced by its signing the 1991 Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Polio cripples and kills young children — this is a harsh reality. The disease has devastating consequences for not only the infected children but also for the country's economy. To achieve the goal of eliminating polio by the year 2000 routine polio vaccine allied with conducting NIDs are must for us — this is a truth we ought not forget and an opportunity we ought not let slip away.

The writer is Admin and Programme Officer of Worldview Bangladesh.

EPI in Bangladesh: Factors Behind Success

by Syed Naquib Muslim



Expanded Programme for immunisation (EPI) has assumed an essential element of child and woman development (CWD) package developed both by the GOs and NGOs in Bangladesh. It is so because there are evidences that the quality of child and maternal health and survival rate of children have improved significantly after the successful operation of the immunisation programme. For a country like Bangladesh which is characterised by low literacy rate, fatalistic outlook of the people and scarcity of resources, attaining a high coverage of immunisation is decidedly a formidable task.

The success of EPI through social mobilisation has prompted the policy-makers to apply or repeat the same communication strategy in other social development areas like primary education, sanitation and youth development.

Door-to-door Approach by Field-workers:

Despite effective health service delivery system and continuous advertisements through Radio and TV, the mothers do not receive the messages about immunisation because they remain occupied with day-long household chores and can pay little attention to what is being advised through electronic media. Numerous mothers still do not have access to radio and TV facilities because of poverty. The EPI workers therefore moved from door to door to talk with them about the benefits of immunisation. Pursuing the "marketing" strategy, health workers visited each household and told mothers about causes and effects of the six fatal diseases from which their children could be saved through immunisation.

They advised mothers to avail vaccination facilities when the government workers visited them. The health workers did not go into details of medical facts; they told the key facts mothers should always remember, which would help them in deciding and then acting. Thus approaching the mothers through direct interpersonal contact and teaching them the benefits of immunisation in simple, catchy and short phrases was one of the key factors that contributed to EPI's exemplary success.

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proved an exception. In addition to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, a number of other ministries became allies for undertaking the crucial task of disseminating the EPI messages. Ministry of Education incorporated EPI ingredients into the school curriculum and involved students to work as volunteers in a number of EPI activities. Last year, Ministry of Information allocated free, prime-time on radio and television everyday.

Local Rotary Clubs raised funds as part of Rotary International's Polio-Plus campaign, scouts, girl guides and other service clubs contributed to the campaign while manufacturers and retailers provided free advertising space on their products and displays.

Role of Media:

Another important element of the plan was programme communication which targeted specific groups, the basic example of which is the "Moni" logo. Moni was not only used on posters and billboards, in newspapers and on TV but also on cars, buses, trucks and rickshaws. Apart from the service delivery channels, the comprehensive use of the mass media provided opportunities for the promotion of maternal health consciousness. Frequent discussion programmes through radio and TV helped in demystifying the goals of EPI to the illiterate rural people. Transmit to others seems a key to avoiding confusing messages.

GO-NGO Collaboration:

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strengthened the immunisation programme throughout the country by training the vaccinators, managers and communicators; providing immunisation services in areas where government services cannot easily reach; furnishing many of the communications' materials which have supported programme expansion; and mobilising local talents and resources for the programme.

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Power but No Respect

The United States may be the world's last superpower, but these days it is not getting the respect it thinks that status deserves. Jim Lobe of Inter Press Service reports from Washington.



military circles, warned Primakov may not only try to stymie US efforts in the Middle East, where he is a special agent, but may also be a harbinger of a new Russo-Chinese entente.

Primakov knows that if he wants more assistance and Western support, he can't back away from fundamental reforms, said one senior Clinton aide who noted that appearing to be in charge can be a successful election strategy.

But others say Primakov's rise may be more than symbolic. Jim Hoagland, foreign affairs columnist for the Washington Post, warned that the former Soviet journalist, while pragmatic, has always displayed a constant and deep distrust of US motives in foreign affairs.

And the New York Times' William Safire, with good contacts in US intelligence and

Chinese protests over his decision to grant a visa to Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui.

The actions have included the 14-year sentencing to prison of long-time dissident and political prisoner Wei Jinghong and continuing assertiveness towards Hong Kong and Taiwan. At the same time, reports of systematic abuse of children in Chinese orphanages have inflamed public opinion here.

In the past several weeks, Beijing has taken a number of actions which some analysts believe could portend a new plunge in bilateral ties similar to that which took place last year when Clinton rejected

Washington has also warned Rao that if India goes ahead and tests a nuclear weapons test — the first since 1974. And then New Delhi announced it would deploy its Prithvi ballistic missile which, according to the US State Department, would be destabilising.

Rao understands the stakes, but he has domestic political stakes, too, said one official. The pressure on him to show that he can stand up to the United States will be greater.



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by Jim Davis



Service Delivery through Outreach Posts: Social mobilisation for EPI led to the creation of 108,000 outreach posts, most of them in private houses lent regularly for the purpose.

The success of EPI was dramatic and exemplary. The question now arises: is the same strategy applicable to other areas like primary education, sanitation?

Primary education is decidedly a vulnerable area. EPI is simpler because specific time and place are fixed for an event (vaccination) to occur. And it is easier to convince the mothers to bring their children to the vaccination site because vaccination is a life-saving matter, it is not time-consuming and it is free of cost. The pay-off was immediate. Moreover, the communities have supported and encouraged the programme which was clearly evident from the response of villagers to participate in vaccination sessions and then organise them in their homes.

The impact of primary education is not immediate. It is also difficult to explain the significance of education especially female education to parents majority of whom are illiterate and dogmatic. Moreover, opportunity cost of sending children to schools is quite high for poor families who engage their children in income-earning or household activities. Controversy still continues about the priority of female education from the economic and social perspective in our country. Therefore, it is doubtful whether communities can be mobilised for primary education as they could be for EPI.

As a social service, primary education has proved much more expensive than EPI. EPI did not need to hire additional staff for vaccination and extra incentives were not required to bring the children to the vaccination sites. This provides best evidence for managerial sustainability of the programme.

It can safely be concluded that success of a programme through social mobilisation will depend on the nature of the programme. Mobilising all segments of society for primary education or for sanitation is likely to be difficult and time-consuming than EPI because the first two require two things:

i) Major behavioural or attitudinal change of various people and ii) Strengthening of the existing service delivery machinery, if the primary education authorities keep these in mind, they can achieve similar success.

The author is deputy director BPATC.

Also, the expulsion and 19-hour incommunicado detention this month of a US defence attaché in China and Beijing's decision to regulate international financial news writing into China have caught Washington off guard.

While senior officials insist that the latter are relatively minor events, they concede that continuing problems like these do little to promote an improvement in relations.

The big challenges looming ahead, according to these officials, are how China will react to a number of developments: Taiwan's presidential election in March and Lee's all-but-certain victory; and to US and Western efforts to get the UN Human Rights Commission to condemn repression against dissidents.

The question is whether the damage from this can be contained and not spin off in a way that creates a more destructive dynamic, said one senior official.

In India, Washington faces a more immediate problem which some believe could become a major crisis.

While bilateral ties — especially in the economic arena — have reached unprecedented levels since Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao launched his reform programme in the early 1990s, relations plunged in November when Congress approved the delivery to Pakistan of US