

# Imperatives for ensuring immunisation: a CSO perspective

DR TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

The important role played by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in supporting routine immunisation services, creating demand for underutilised and new vaccines and strengthening health systems is widely recognised. As members of the Gavi Alliance, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (WHO) share similar interests in developing strategic partnerships with civil society, additionally, this is an objective of United Nations reform.

CSOs in Asia have long been involved in public health including community mobilisation and increasing access to services for marginalised and hard-to-reach populations, especially in areas with sub-optimal government infrastructure.

CSOs also play a vital role in providing technical assistance, programme monitoring, evaluation and documentation, and operational research, to name just a few.

Despite the recognition that CSOs play vital roles in immunisation and health systems, they often have difficulty accessing fora where they can share their experiences and expertise to influence health policy.



In that relation, the decision to conduct a regional CSO activity in Asia originated from the June 2015 Gavi CSO Constituency Steering Committee meetings in Geneva. The Steering Committee aims to strengthen the collaboration of CSOs in Asia by bringing organisations together to reflect

upon the role of CSOs in immunisation programmes in the region and to facilitate the creation of synergies among CSOs and agencies who contribute to reaching the SDGs.

Most of the countries in the region grapple with inequities in access to immunisation. A

regional meeting would be conducive to sharing best practices, discussing what works in increasing coverage and equity in immunisation services, and understanding where Asia Pacific regional collaborations on health currently exist and how we might strengthen them.

Following a long process, an Asia Regional CSO Workshop in Dhaka, Bangladesh is going to be organised during February 27-28, 2017 on *Empowerment of Civil Society in Asia: Boosting Collaboration and Involvement in Immunisation and Health Programmes*.

Anuradha Gupta, Deputy CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance said on this occasion, "For Gavi, CSOs are an important constituency, extremely vital. I always feel that the Alliance is incomplete without the civil society organisations - you are the watchdogs, you are the conscience keepers, but you are also directly the service providers. As Gavi moves into a new strategic era in 2016-2020, which is focused in improving coverage equity and sustainability of immunisation making sure that every child who is today missed receive the full range of lifesaving vaccines, the role of CSOs is going to become an even more critical than before."

She also added, "The role of country platforms would become extremely important. We are now really hoping to see some very encouraging outcomes of this engagements."

E-mail: tareq.salahuddin@thedailystar.net

## HEALTH TIPS

### Why eat beets?

Although beets have the highest sugar content of all vegetables, most people can safely eat beet roots a few times a week enjoying not only their sweet, earthy flavor but also their powerhouse nutrients that may improve your health in the following ways.



**Lower blood pressure:** Drinking beet juice may help to lower blood pressure in a matter of hours. One study found that drinking one glass of beet juice lowered systolic blood pressure by an average of 4-5 points.

**Boosts stamina:** If you need a boost to make it through your next workout, beet juice may again prove valuable. Those who drank beet juice prior to exercise were able to exercise for up to 16% longer.

**Fight inflammation:** Beets are a unique source of betaine, a nutrient that helps protect cells, proteins, and enzymes from environmental stress. It is also known to help fight inflammation, protect internal organs, improve vascular risk factors, enhance performance, and likely help prevent numerous chronic diseases.

**Anti-cancer properties:** The powerful phytonutrients that give beets their deep crimson colour may help to ward off cancer. Research has shown that beetroot extract reduced multi-organ tumour formations in various animal models when administered in drinking water, for instance, while beetroot extract is also being studied for use in treating human pancreatic, breast, and prostate cancers.

**Rich in valuable nutrients and fibre:** Beets are high in immune-boosting vitamin C, fibre and essential minerals like potassium and manganese. Beets also contain the B vitamin folate, which helps reduce the risk of birth defects.

## HEALTH bulletin

### Modern contraceptive options in Bangladesh

RICHARD HUBBARD, SHIRA GOLDSTEIN, SADIA PARVEEN, and SAKIB CHOWDHURY

While the fertility rate in Bangladesh is slowly declining, overpopulation remains a national concern. Access to effective contraceptives (also called "birth control" or "family planning") continues to be a challenge. Finding accurate information can be difficult, and many unplanned pregnancies result from improper use of contraceptives. Thankfully couples in Bangladesh now have a wide range of options for birth control that can help prevent pregnancy while still giving them the option to have children in the future.

While the birth control pill remains the most popular option in

Bangladesh, it is only effective if taken every day. Missing doses could result in pregnancy. Fortunately, there are other methods that require much less attention. The depo injection, which involves a single shot every three months, is more effective than the pill. The implant, a small device that is placed under the skin in the arm, can provide up to five years of protection from pregnancy, and is more effective than the pill or the depo injection.

The intrauterine device (IUD) is another easily available but less commonly used option; it is a small T-shaped device placed in the uterus. IUDs can provide pregnancy protection for 5-10 years, and can be removed at any time. Voluntary sterilisation (permanent contracep-

tion) is also available at majority healthcare facilities, even in the upazilla level, and is especially worth considering by couples who have decided not to have any more children.

The good news for couples is that birth control is widely subsidised by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) of Bangladesh, and services are available in all divisions of Bangladesh. The MoHFW also works with national and international partners to help bring contraceptive services to as many Bangladeshis as possible. This makes contraception cheap and easy to access. There are also options for women who have been exposed to unprotected sex. Progestin Only Pills (POP) are available over the counter to avoid getting pregnant, but must be taken within several days of the event to be effective.

All birth control methods come with risks and benefits, and you must talk to a healthcare provider before using them. None of these methods prevent sexually transmitted infections (STI) or HIV/AIDS.

These life-threatening diseases can be prevented by condoms and the good news is that now there are condoms available for both men and women. Knowing your options will help keep you safe from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.



### Deprivation in early childhood can affect mental health

Experiencing severe deprivation and neglect in childhood can have a lasting psychological impact into early adulthood, according to a unique study published in The Lancet.

The English and Romanian Adoptees study began shortly after the fall of the communist regime in Romania. Children living in institutions were subjected to extremely poor hygiene, insufficient food, little personalised care and no social or cognitive stimulation.

"Being exposed to very severe conditions in childhood can be associated with lasting and deep-seated social, emotional and cognitive problems, which are complex and vary over time," said lead author Professor Edmund Sonuga-Barke, King's College London, UK.



### EMI pay service introduced at the United Hospital



United Hospital Ltd. signed an agreement with Southeast Bank Ltd. recently which facilitates the credit cardholders of Southeast Bank availing Equated Monthly Installment (EMI) facility to pay off the price up to 36 months under the name of 'EMI Pay'.

### SMO services launched in Dhaka



GD Assist Limited, a subsidiary of Green Delta Insurance launched Second Medical Opinion (SMO) Services in association with Assist America Inc. recently. SMO allows a participant to receive a documented second medical opinion on a complex, grave or critical illness diagnosis, directly from a specialist working in a world class medical institution.



## If you are PREGNANT, and travelling to UK/US, you should learn about ZIKA VIRUS

### SYMPTOMS:

-Though 80% of individuals infected have no symptoms, mostly it includes fever, rash, joint pain and red eyes and may last from a few days to about a week.

### FACTS:

-The virus has been linked to an increase in cases of a rare neurological condition called Microcephaly in babies. Microcephaly results in babies being born with abnormally small heads, and often serious, and sometimes Deadly, developmental delays.

It prompted the salvadoran vice minister of health to tell women there not to get pregnant for two years, echoing similar warnings in Colombia and Jamaica.

### AFFECTED AREAS:

-Prior to 2015, Zika virus outbreaks have occurred in areas of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. In recent years, it is found in South America & Europe as well.

Zika virus/Zika fever is a mosquito borne disease. An individual becomes infected by the bite of an infected mosquito.

