



Celebrities push visibility, advocate with community leaders

New Delhi/Lucknow

A series of assessments and monitoring of the polio programme, including the ACPE and Communication TAG, have laid emphasis on the issue of fatigue in the programme which, it has been suggested, can partly be dealt with the

engagement of celebrities. The communication needs of the polio programme also include a robust media environment, a universal understanding of the programme's focus and intentions as well as high levels of motivation among field workers and influential groups such as the media and the community leaders. The

programme has made a strategic use of celebrities, including film personalities from "Bollywood" and sportspersons – particularly cricket since it is a popular sport in India.

Film personality Farooque Shaikh has been associated with the polio eradication programme for many years and has helped garner and consolidate the support of community leaders. He made another visit this November around the polio round. His major engagements included meeting with nearly a hundred leaders of the Muslim community gathered from across the state. Led by the Islamic Centre of India, the meeting was supported by all programme partners. Shaikh congratulated the community leaders for using their positions and goodwill for children's well-being and assured them that the bulk of the work was over and with perseverance and faith, there would be "good news" soon.

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Former Indian cricket captain Saurav Ganguly immunises a child with UNICEF India Representative Dr. Gianni Murzi, Rotary International's Deepak Kapur and WHO-NPSP India's Dr. Sunil Bahl

Bihar vaccinates 800,000 children in Chhath festival round, battles P3 virus

Patna

Being perceptive to new challenges is a programme priority in the endemic states. In Bihar, the programme has been responding to the re-emergence of the poliovirus and the return of a large number of migrants from non-endemic parts of India during festivals. The "Chhath" festival in Bihar is an occasion when a large proportion of Bihar's migrant population comes back – the families bringing with them a cohort of susceptible children who may have received minimal vaccination back in their states of residence where polio rounds are not conducted as frequently and routinely as in Bihar – one of the two states endemic to the poliovirus. The Chhath

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Partners in U.P. identify gaps and solutions during annual meeting

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Media environment stable in spite of P3 increase

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An analysis of the print media in Delhi and Mumbai, Lucknow and the western Uttar Pradesh districts – most endemic for polio – at the end of November shows that increase in P3 cases this year did not necessarily result in negative media for the programme.

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Partners in U.P. identify gaps and solutions during annual meeting

Lucknow

Committed to achieving results within a timeframe, the polio programme partners continuously find ways of enhancing programme effectiveness in the field. A joint review by the sub-regional co-ordinators (SRCs) of WHO-NPSP, UNICEF and CORE in Uttar Pradesh has just been completed with this intention. The SRC Joint Review focussed on areas such as operations, partnership, communication and media and advocacy. A number of decisions were taken or decisions taken earlier were reviewed for their effectiveness and impact on the programme.

The SRC Joint Review has been institutionalised as a forum that guides strategy formulation for the partners. SRCs manage a sub-region that comprises several districts and are the senior-most personnel stationed outside the state headquarters. They are a dependable repository of information and experience and their role is critical in achieving results in the



The Joint SRC Review in progress in Lucknow attended by programme partners and the new Health and Family Welfare Secretary, Uttar Pradesh, Ms. Neeta Chowdhry (left).

programme. The Joint Review was attended by Principal Secretary, Health, to the Government of Uttar Pradesh, and senior officers from WHO-NPSP, Core and UNICEF.

With several agencies working together for polio eradication, partnership holds the key to a successful programme. Efforts have to be made therefore from time to time to address issues in order to enhance the combined efforts of individual organisations. One part of the Joint Review was therefore

devoted to partnership. Among the decisions taken jointly was the formation of a state-level group for engaging with the Government of Uttar Pradesh so that the issues related to the programme could be addressed together. The SRCs were expected to "lead by example" in partner co-ordination

In a discussion on operational issues, the criteria for identifying high-risk areas (HRAs) were revisited and the categorisation of missed

houses was discussed. The decisions included that the high-risk area approach using a host of factors such as occurrence of polio cases, refusal, etc. would continue. The issue that came up for discussion was whether district teams could identify high-risk areas on the basis of their own perception rather than going strictly by the HRA criteria. The decision was that districts could make a "10 per cent adjustment" to the HRAs, an earlier practice that was reconfirmed. It was decided that a working-group would be constituted to review those houses in western Uttar Pradesh which remain in the X category in spite of efforts. The group would recommend measures to bring them into the immunisation fold.

Another issue was that children who are reported "sick" during immunisation rounds should sometimes, based on evidence and perception, be seen as tacit refusal which needs to be recognised. But it was agreed that the house will continue to be marked XS (meaning a

missed house where the child is sick) and a medical officer will be mobilized to address the family's concern. Overall, it was felt that any X houses in UP is the responsibility of both operations and communication teams, and that it would be a joint effort to ensure no child was missed during polio campaigns.

In the discussion on the underserved strategy, much time was spent on the future role of local Muslim 'influencers' to work with vaccinator teams during house-to-house activities. The social mobilisation network (SMNet) relies on the local knowledge of these 'influencers', where data suggests their involvement plays an effective role in encouraging X to P conversions. Some partners felt that maintaining the interest and support of influencers was difficult, and that their role should be specifically focussed on dealing with resistance. Others argued for their continued involvement during afternoon revisits to all X-marked

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Celebrities push visibility....

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Shaikh also made the launch of the polio round more visible by immunising children at the polio booth and strategically engaging senior journalists from the Hindi and Urdu media even as he addressed a cross-section of the Uttar Pradesh media in another meeting. The impact of his visit on the media environment can be gauged from an analysis of media stories. Positive media stories in the Lucknow media in November were 60 compared with only seven in October. Out of these, as many as 22 stories (more than one-third) are a result of Shaikh's visit.

Farooque Shaikh is an extremely well-recognised public figure in India and has made several field visits for the programme

in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. He has focussed on engaging with community leaders and visiting areas reporting refusals. In Meerut, for instance, he helped give a big thrust to efforts to increase acceptance in 2004. The number of refusals stands at around 400 currently. Talking about the change he has witnessed over a period of time, he said, "In comparison with my first visit to Meerut in 2004, I can see that the clergy, community and the media have been supporting the programme. And this has given energy and enthusiasm to the eradication efforts."

Other celebrity visits on the anvil are cricketers' visits to Bihar and New Delhi and Farooque Shaikh's visit to the Agra-Ferozabad region which is being regarded as a "danger zone" for now.



Farooque Shaikh with community leaders gathered from 25 districts of Uttar Pradesh.



Farooque Shaikh immunises a child at the launch of the polio round in Lucknow on November 25

The recent series between the cricket the India and Pakistan cricket teams is being utilised for the benefit of polio and two events have already been held. While Indian players are participating in events related to polio, players from the Pakistan team too have immunised children and voiced their views on the urgency of polio eradication.

In the month of November, two parallel initiatives with celebrities and sportspersons helped raise programme visibility and advocate with decision-makers and influential groups supporting the programme. The initiative with the Indian cricket team was started in 2003 as the "Bowl Out Polio" campaign. The initiative has found an immediate resonance with the cricketers who wish to see the

young people of India fit and ready for sports.

With the cricket teams playing in New Delhi, a unique opportunity came up to have them immunise the children on the eve of the sub-national immunisation days (SNID). The turn-out was impressive. While the entire Indian cricket team turned up



Indian cricket team player R.P. Singh presents a "Bowl out Polio" bat to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Ms. Mayawati.

and many of the popular players such as Sachin Tendulkar, Mahendra Singh Dhoni and captain Anil Kumble immunised children, players from Pakistan too participated. The ones who did included captain of the team Shoaib Malik, apart from Shoaib Akhtar and Danish Kaneria. The immunisation event was organised jointly by the partners. The event was co-ordinated by Rotary International's India Polio Plus Committee chairman Deepak Kapur. The Indian cricket team has also signed three bats with a message on polio eradication for the two chief ministers of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and the Health Minister of India. On November 11, one of the bats was presented to the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Ms. Mayawati at Kanpur at the end of the one-day cricket match.

Media environment stable in spite of P3 increase

New Delhi/Lucknow

An analysis of the print media in Delhi and Mumbai, Lucknow and the western Uttar Pradesh districts – most endemic for polio – at the end of November shows that increase in P3 cases this year did not necessarily result in negative media for the programme. Both Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have had P3 outbreaks even though an increase in P3 cases in Uttar Pradesh was said to be part of the “calculated risk” the India Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) had envisaged in May this year. However, in May the total number of cases was 32 which has risen to 411 as on November 29.

An analysis of the media shows that the year started with a significant proportion of media stories in Delhi-Mumbai being negative – a most likely impact of the P1 outbreak in Uttar Pradesh in 2006. However, negative media declined to around 28 per cent in February. Between April and June when cases started to come up, negative media remained at around 29 per cent with positive and neutral media at 51 and 20 per cent.

However, between July and September – the high-season for the poliovirus when the largest number of cases is usually reported – negative media dipped to 12.5 per cent. There was an increase therefore

in positive and neutral media – 46 and 41.5 per cent in Delhi and Mumbai. What is notable, however, is the overall increase in the number of stories reported across the three locations during the months of July to September. For instance, while 186 stories were recorded in Delhi-Mumbai papers in April-June period, as many as 310 stories were recorded between July and September – more than 60 per cent increase. Lucknow and the western Uttar Pradesh districts, too, reported a similar increase indicating a huge media interest in polio. While the reason for this is more cases being reported, a decline in negative media stories around this time shows



Some of the media coverage on Farooque Shaikh's visit to Lucknow

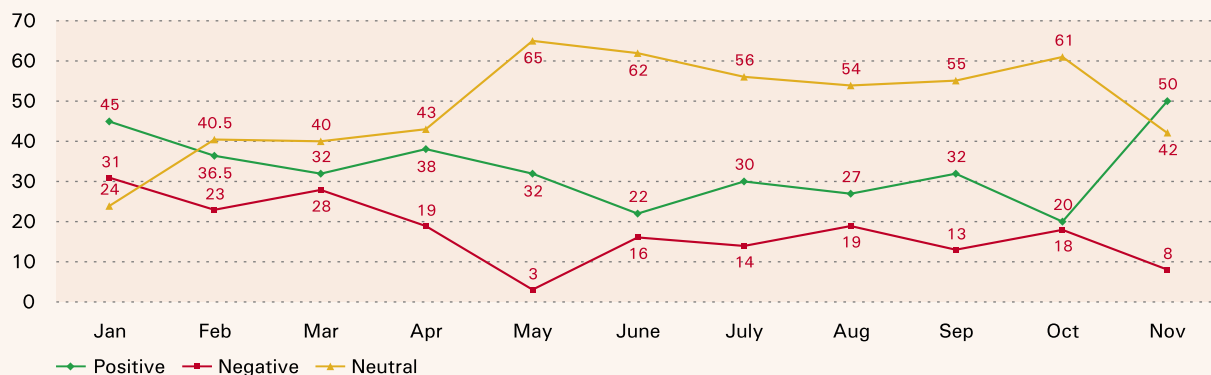
a more balanced approach while reporting new polio cases.

The trends also show a spurt in positive media stories in Lucknow and the districts largely on account of advocacy with the Haj pilgrims. An analysis of positive media shows that such stories often have to be created and are a result of programme interventions or communication effort (such as celebrity engagement or media workshops)

positive media stories originate in government action, which shows the effectiveness of government interest to move the programme and the link-up with the media.

November was a good month for the media and three celebrity-communication initiatives in Lucknow, Kanpur and New Delhi have increased programme visibility and positive print media coverage. In Lucknow, positive media is up from 21 per cent in October to 50 per cent in November.

Percentage of print media stories by tonality, Lucknow, Jan-Nov 2007



Bihar vaccinates 800,000 children.... Cont. from Page 1

transit vaccination strategy addresses the need to immunise and protect them.

For the past many years, the importance of the Chhath festival in the polio eradication strategy has been recognised. Over the years, more and more manpower has been deployed to carry out the difficult of vaccinating children at the railway and bus stations, roads and intersections and the ghats (riverbanks) where women and men gather in large numbers to pray to the Sun God as they immerse themselves in water. The trained vaccinators are required to spot the newborns and children below five years and immunise them before they are lost in the crowd. In 2005, as

many as 693 transit teams were deployed in 18 districts (out of 38) of Bihar who vaccinated .47 million children. In 2006, 1,713 teams vaccinated 1.5 million children in 34 districts. This year, 787 teams vaccinated .8 million children. The communication support to the initiative included training of transit vaccinators, provision of IEC material and helping monitor the quality of initiatives.

The decline in the number of children immunised this year has been attributed to the polio round that concluded three days (November 4) before the Chhath vaccination started (November 7). Last year, the regular polio round took place one month before Chhath so all children were vaccinated. This time,



A woman stops to get her child vaccinated before she goes to the "ghat" (riverbank) for Chhath.



A vaccinator is quick to find a family arrived at the bus station in Bihar before they head home.

children's finger markings (to show if they have been recently vaccinated) were examined before they were given polio drops. This year, only children who came to Bihar from outside the state were vaccinated.

Bihar is also currently dealing with the P3 virus that has returned to the state after three years of absence. Out of 102 cases in the state this year, 69 are caused by the P3 virus. Until this year, Bihar had last reported a P3 type virus in 2004 and had relied mostly on mOPV1 for immunisation in all polio rounds. However, with the P3 cases being reported in Uttar Pradesh which neighbours Bihar, cases have come up here as well. The state has held

two rounds in October and November with mOPV3 vaccine to protect children.

As the state goes to the next round on December 9, both mOPV1 and mOPV 3 will be used to immunise children. Re-emphasising the state's resolve to eradicate polio, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has requested polio programme partners to orient the government staff from health and ICDS departments. This is a motivational measure to get them to understand the role of P3 cases in taking the state figures up to 102 – an increase from 61 cases in 2006. These orientations are also being organised for the community leaders including panchayat and religious heads.

Partners in U.P. identify gaps and solutions....

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houses was essential to ensuring high levels of X to P conversion. After close consideration of the pros and cons, the partners agreed to retain the status quo on influencer involvement, who will be mobilized to revisit all X-marked houses. Additional efforts will be put in to recognizing their contribution in order to ensure high levels of motivation and participation.

In a discussion on media and celebrities, it was decided that the media focus would be extended to "emerging-risk" districts. So far the focus of media interventions has been western Uttar Pradesh. However, there are other districts which are reporting issues such as resistance where media interventions could be employed to build a supportive environment for the programme. Another recommendation was engaging celebrities and popular sportspersons as much as possible to enhance visibility of the programme. A strategic plan of celebrity involvement in the programme for 2008 is under development.