

## **THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN REPORT 2008: CHILD SURVIVAL**

### **A PAKISTANI PERSPECTIVE**

#### **OVERVIEW:**

The State of the World's Children Report is UNICEF's flagship publication on global efforts to provide a secure, healthy and nurturing environment for children. In 2008, the report takes as its theme integrated approaches to ensure child survival and development. Good nutrition and health and a hygienic environment provide children with the foundation to build a healthy life and develop their full potential. In many developing countries high-impact interventions, such as vaccinating against dangerous but preventable diseases, can save thousands of lives every year. Ensuring that every child has access to safe water and basic sanitation prevents the spread of disease. Supporting such interventions and helping families and communities learn how they can protect and care for their children are vital aspects of child survival and development. Training and equipping healthcare professionals and strengthening the health sector help ensure that quality health care is available wherever and whenever children need it. In emergencies, such as natural disasters or conflict, when children are often significantly affected, it becomes essential to provide safe drinking water and sanitation, vaccines and essential medicines, and nutrition support to ensure their survival and healthy development.

In Pakistan, some of the challenges to child survival include a high rate of preventable disease, exacerbated by poor health infrastructure and misconceptions regarding vaccination; high female illiteracy preventing access to health information; inadequate sanitation and hygiene; lack of knowledge about child nutrition; and lack of access to medical checkups for pregnant women and trained assistance during childbirth. In addition, Pakistan has faced two serious natural disasters: the earthquake of 2005 which killed an estimated 73,000 people and left 3.3 million homeless, and the floods of 2007 which affected 2.5 million people in Balochistan and Sindh.

#### **ISSUES:**

**More than 1,100 Pakistani children under five years of age will die today, about 600 of them will be under a month old. This means that in Pakistan an estimated 423,000 children under five years of age die every year.**

While Pakistan has made some progress in child survival and development, much needs to be done to cut down drastically the number of children under five dying mostly of preventable causes. Most shockingly, almost six out of ten children dying under the age of five die in their first month of life, usually at home and without access to essential health services and basic life-saving medicine.

Among children who die before their fourth week of life, the most common causes are low body temperature due to exposure to severe cold (hypothermia), low birth weight and suffocation (or asphyxia, when the baby is unable to breathe due to the physical blockage of the airway or other causes). All these may be prevented with hygiene and good nutrition for mothers, and by giving birth in the presence of skilled birth attendants such as a trained midwife, a nurse or a doctor. One of the major reasons for newborn deaths is that mothers do not get proper skilled care during

pregnancy and childbirth, because of lack of knowledge, lack of access to services and the low status of women in society. To reduce the number of child deaths, it is vital that mothers receive high quality health care, education and good nourishment.

The most common causes of death amongst children under five, aside from newborns, are pneumonia and diarrhoea. Both of these are preventable or treatable with good hygiene and nutrition, and prompt medical attention. Simply ensuring clean drinking water, sanitation and hygienic practices for everyone can cut deaths by diarrhoea by half and prevent the spread of disease.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are commitments made by the world's countries to reduce poverty and inequality by 2015. Reducing child deaths is an important part of this effort. Pakistan's progress in achieving the MDGs can be measured as follows:

| ISSUE  | Pakistan's MDG Target by 2015  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>97 of 1,000 Pakistani children die before the age of 5 years. 78 of these die before they are one year old. 57 die before they are a month old. (UNICEF, WHO, UNPD, UNSD 2006)</li> </ul>   | 52 of every 1,000 under 5  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For every 100,000 live births, 320 women die due to causes related to pregnancy and child birth. The number rises to 600 in Balochistan Province. (UNICEF, WHO adjusted 2005)</li> </ul>  | 140 of every 100,000   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>38% of children under five are moderately or severely underweight. In Pakistan, only 37% of children under 6 months are fed exclusively on breastmilk, which gives all the nutrients and protection the child needs (DHS 2007)</li> </ul> | 20%  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>91% of the population use improved drinking water sources. (MICS, DHS, WHO, UNICEF 2004)</li> </ul>   | 93%  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>59% of rural Pakistanis do not have access to adequate sanitation facilities. (MICS, DHS, WHO, UNICEF 2004)</li> </ul>  | 90% of rural and urban population have access to adequate sanitation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pakistan is one of four countries in the world where polio is still endemic. There were 31 cases of polio in Pakistan in 2007. (Ministry of Health, National EPI Cell, 14 January 2008)</li> </ul>  | Zero cases   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Every day 58 Pakistani children die from measles. In 2006, 63% of children were vaccinated through routine immunization services. (UNICEF, WHO 2006)</li> </ul>   | 90% of all children immunised against the measles                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only 31% of deliveries take place in the presence of a skilled birth attendant. (DHS, MICS, WHO and UNICEF)</li> </ul>  | 90% of births with skilled attendants                                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only 36% of pregnant women receive medical checkups during pregnancy. (DHS, MICS, WHO and UNICEF)</li> </ul>  | 90% of women receive antenatal checkups                              |

### **ACTION AND IMPACT:**

**With donor support and in collaboration with federal, provincial and local governments, sister UN agencies and local and international Non Governmental Organisations, UNICEF is working on projects such as:**

- A vaccination programme is underway to immunise 80 per cent of children in 134 districts against many preventable diseases by 2008. By 2007, it achieved 90 per cent vaccination in target districts of Punjab and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), over 70 per cent in Sindh and NWFP, and over 50 per cent in Balochistan and the Northern Areas.
- A nation-wide government measles campaign with UNICEF and World Health Organisation (WHO) support is being conducted from March 2007 to March 2008. In 2007, about 30 million children between 9 months and 13 years were vaccinated, achieving over 95 per cent coverage. By October 2007, reported cases of measles fell to nearly half those in 2006. In earthquake affected districts, there were over 1.1 million vaccinations in 2005.
- In 2007, the Pakistani government conducted with UNICEF and WHO support nine supplementary immunisation campaigns against polio, achieving over 95 per cent coverage nation-wide. To prevent cross-border transmission, 630,000 children were vaccinated at border posts with Afghanistan. Eighty per cent of districts have reported no polio cases in two years, and the number of polio cases has fallen from over 5,000 in 1993 to 31 in 2007. However, the target of zero cases is yet to be achieved.
- To reduce the number of maternal and newborn deaths, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and their partners concentrated on training health workers, from community midwives to hospital staff, in emergency obstetric and neonatal care. With UNICEF support, 69 hospitals in 11 districts were upgraded to provide round-the-clock care for women suffering from complications in pregnancy and childbirth. A new cadre of 74 midwives were trained, and a similar group has entered training.
- About two-thirds of the earthquake-affected population, an estimated 2.3 million people, are served by health services supported by UNICEF. Medicines, equipment, supplies and personnel were provided to 127 health facilities.
- A network of over 2,000 community health workers serving 830,000 people in the earthquake-affected areas was established to provide first aid, essential medicine and health and hygiene education to families living in remote and under-served areas.
- In Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar, over 3,000 women were counselled and tested for HIV and those who tested positive were given follow-up care. Protocols and guidelines on preventing parent to child transmission and for paediatric AIDS clinical management were produced and implementers trained.

- Over 30,000 mothers and children were treated for malnutrition in earthquake affected areas, and over 29,000 in flood-affected areas in Balochistan and Sindh.
- About 40,000 girl students in 378 primary schools were provided safe drinking water and improved sanitation facilities. About 1,200 teachers received training in school sanitation and hygiene education in the four provinces and FATA, and a centre on hygiene education was established in NWFP. Nearly 2,000 earthquake-affected schools, with over 190,000 children were provided safe water and sanitation.
- An estimated four million people received awareness about better hygiene in the home and the community.
- With UNICEF support, about 82,500 people living in 71 villages in NWFP, Balochistan, Punjab and AJK, are free of open defecation, creating a healthier environment for children and decreasing the cases of diarrhoea.