

## Polio Partners Discuss Communication for Development

On 17 July 2009 in New York Headquarters, UNICEF Programme Division convened a meeting of partners to review progress in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), with a special focus on programme communication and social mobilization activities. The meeting was called in the context of accelerating UNICEF's response for the intensified polio eradication activities planned for 2010 to 2013. The meeting provided an opportunity to articulate the UNICEF vision and commitment to PEI, get feedback from key partners and for partners to provide updates on their work in polio eradication.

The GPEI is the largest public health initiative in history, and has achieved over a 99% reduction of polio cases since its inception in 1988 when the World Health Assembly adopted eradication as a global health goal. As a spearheading partner, UNICEF has the lead role in vaccine supply and logistics and communication.

Participants in the meeting included representatives from the other spearheading partners, the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rotary International, and from key donors such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID and the UN Foundation. The UNICEF Director of Programmes, Dr. Nicholas Alipui, chaired the meeting, which was opened by Dr. Saad Houry, and had the presence of the UNICEF Executive Director, Ms. Anne Veneman for a keynote discussion.

“It really is about this last final inch, which is the most difficult. But if cannot get polio drops to 80% of the children, then how are we going to reach them with other child survival interventions?”

Anne Veneman,  
UNICEF Executive Director

There are four remaining polio endemic countries—Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan—and a number of re-infected countries primarily in Africa. Challenges to polio eradication include insecurity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, identifying the remaining unreached children in the northern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Behar, and improving service delivery. The partnership will work to address these issues through more participatory methods that give ownership to local communities, and will improve capacity with the expansion of polio workers to these areas to augment local efforts.

UNICEF presented an overview of its role in the partnership and outlined how the organization would complement other partners in the intensification of activities over the next three years. The GPEI had initially set the year 2000 as a target date for global eradication. But due to setbacks and the spread of poliovirus to previously polio free countries, eradication was not achieved. New tools and tactics are constantly being developed to attain this hard fought goal.