POLIO ROUND-UP
AFGHANISTAN

3,592,786
OPV vaccines distributed to implement a SNID & manage people on the move through a cross border permanent transit team

7,538
social mobilisers reached families with life-saving information about polio

OCTOBER 2017
In September, UNICEF announced an official partnership with Afghanistan’s National Cricket Board. The cricketers promote immunisation and give vaccines during national tournaments. The September 2017 National Immunisation Campaign was launched at the final of the national cricket tournament, which was broadcast live and viewed by 20 million Afghans.

Laal Mohammad refused to allow vaccinators into his house, until his niece Bibi was paralyzed. At just two years old, Bibi contracted polio because she was not vaccinated.

When Bibi contracted polio, Laal realised his fateful mistake. He is now one of Kandahar’s biggest polio eradication advocates.

Laal and his niece live in Loya Wial: a vast residential area covered in small mud houses. There is no sanitation or safe water; children play in dusty streets covered in sewage and conflict is rife. Despite Loya Wial testing positive for the polio virus, many families still refuse the vaccine – mainly, because they do not trust where it comes from.

Laal has turned his house into a guesthouse for polio eradication meetings, where he persuades other families to take the vaccine. He is nicknamed ‘Malik’ (chief) and also acts as a traditional ‘Jirga’ (mediator) for solving community grievances.

Meet Laal: critic turned advocate

“Grandpa knows best”

7,000 speaking books called ‘Grandpa Knows Best’ are being distributed by UNICEF health workers with critical life-saving messages. With 16 pages of easy to understand text, illustrations and a sound track recorded in Dari and Pashto, the speaking books are accessible for everyone, especially illiterate communities. The books were purchased with the generous support of Rotary International. On World Polio Day the Kabul and Jalalabad branches of the Rotary Club held successful fundraising events that raised more than USD30,000.
newly recruited social mobilisers are now trained on integrated healthcare including routine immunisation, hand-washing, sanitation and nutrition in Kunduz - a high risk area that recently had a polio case. An additional 4,790 polio workers were also trained during October.

A new case of polio was confirmed in Nawaqil village of Bati Kot district, Nangarhar. This was the seventh of eight cases in Afghanistan, and the first case of polio to be detected in Nangarhar in two years. The victim is a 15 month-old girl who is now paralyzed permanently. On October 17, 355 social mobilisers immediately responded by vaccinating 146,858 children in just three days in five districts: Batikot, Achin, Momandara, Lal pur and Shinwar.

Instead of two vaccinators and one social mobiliser, a two-person team (one vaccinator and one social mobiliser) pilot approach has been implemented in Behsud district. 53 two-person teams vaccinated children in addition to mobilisation. The approach will be replicated in the South in November.

Over half of children who missed the polio vaccine (33,461), were captured during a ‘mop-up’ campaign implemented by social mobilisers. A further 4,700 children out of 16,659 who were initially refused the vaccine were convinced by social mobilisers to take it.
THE SOUTH

Senior doctors join forces

On 2nd October, 50 senior doctors and medical professors joined forces to discuss why Kandahar is the region with the highest number of polio vaccination refusals (approx 2%).

Participants raised concerns and shared ideas on how to improve the programme. Key concerns and recommendations included: addressing the root causes of why people are refusing the vaccine; more engagement with Mullah Imams; involvement with community health-workers and including polio education in school textbooks.

Special Investigation

Children missing polio drops in certain districts of Kandahar province is the highest in Afghanistan. To understand the reasons why children are missing the polio vaccine in the South, UNICEF has launched a special investigation. The final results will be published in November.

BBC marks World Polio Day

On 24th October, Kandahar celebrated World Polio Day with a regional debate about the polio eradication programme. The BBC provided a space for doctors, polio workers and polio victims to address rumour about the vaccine to a live audience. Over 60 people participated in the debate, and it was broadcast to over 10 million people on BBC Pashto.

Fact, not fiction

On 3rd October, 45 journalists from five southern provinces came together for two days to learn about polio. The accurate reporting of polio is critical to reduce rumour and ensure communities have the facts.
“I AM THE KING OF THIS VILLAGE! Every child belongs to me and I will spread my poison to a new person every day,” screams the snake, bursting onto the stage.

Hamid, clutching his precious box of vaccinations, attacks the snake, managing to defeat him. The crowd cheers. “Vaccinating your children will destroy this disease!” cries Hamid. “Make sure your whole village takes these droplets and you will see how strong you and your children can be.”

This poisonous snake represents the dangerous threat of polio, a disease that Afghanistan is fighting hard to eradicate. Hamid leads a touring youth circus group made up of teenagers from all across the capital, Kabul, who perform juggling, acrobatics and theatre routines for local audiences around the city and beyond. The circus was started 14 years ago by Mobile Mini Circus for Children. It is supported by UNICEF.

The circus enables the teenagers who join, often from internally displaced communities around Kabul “to go to school every day and also practise circus skills. Part of their impressive performance includes passing on vital messages about healthcare and social issues to the audience, who may otherwise not have access to this information.

“We pass on these important messages in a fun way which people listen to and they understand. Giving a message without fun means people will not take that message away,” says Hamid.

This is especially true of the children, who flock to the circus the moment they see youngsters their own age pull out their juggling sticks and begin clowning around on the makeshift stage. “We often perform in the IDP [internally displaced persons] camps”, says Hamid.

“These areas are not peaceful and the people have no proper shelters, no electricity, no running water. These are the conditions in which diseases such as polio can spread, yet getting a simple vaccination in the form of a few droplets on the tongue means a child is protected for life.”