



## EPI PEI Synergy

**By Ms. Huma Khawar, CSO Coordinator, FDI**

Outside the Immunization Room located in informal settlement of Meherabadi near sector F-11 the banner read: *Hifazati teekay muhafiz zindagi ke* (Vaccines safeguard human life). Inside, another poster reiterated the message *Polio se bachao ka teeka chauda hafte aur noh mah ki umar men.* (Polio injectable vaccine to be given at the age of 14 weeks and 9 months).

In the corner of a busy room, Nighat Rani, the female vaccinator working with the front line health care co-workers is busy vaccinating children one after the other as mothers wait patiently with babies in their arms.

Zoya Qasim, 11 months old baby girl is overdue for her visit. "This is the injection for Polio," Rani informs the mother as after giving her two shots, she picks up the third IPV vial to fill. "It is critically important for your child's health," she addresses the concerned mother about the third shot to be given to her child.



Zoya's initial vaccination up to four months was complete at the same private hospital where she was born. Due to competing priorities, her mother, a working woman missed her shots due at the age of nine months. Today, she had come here on the insistence of the polio worker who, during the Polio campaign in Islamabad informed her of the nearest vaccination center she could go for vaccination of her child even on a Saturdays.

She knew about a EPI Centre near her home, but she trusted the services provided at the private hospital only. However, on visiting for the first time the free of cost government funded EPI vaccination facility, she was pleasantly surprised at the cleanliness and the behavior of the vaccinator, mother and daughter left the EPI Centre highly satisfied-

Behavior and communication skills of health care providers are important to convince mothers about vaccination. Both, the polio volunteers as well as the EPI vaccinators are playing their role in convincing care givers and removing vaccine hesitancy. While the Expanded Programme on Immunization vaccinators are ensuring every child is vaccinated with polio vaccine, Polio infrastructure is facilitating improved routine immunization and the volunteers deployed in hard to reach areas are mobilizing families not only for polio but also for Routine Immunization as well.

"Unfortunately, however, even today, many mothers erroneously believe that polio drops administered to their kids during door-to-door campaigns means the infant has been immunized against all kinds of diseases. They are not aware of the other eleven vaccines included in the schedule for which they are required to visit EPI center", says Bilquees, a social mobilizer working for Polio programme.

As the two programmes, Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) and Polio Eradication Initiative (PEI) now work in tandem thus supplementing each other's programme towards synergies, more and more community volunteers and communicators are being involved in helping address vaccine misconceptions and hesitancy, both for polio and for routine vaccines.

Sharing human resource and enhancing community engagement to track zero dose and partially immunized children is no more just on papers or at the policy level but now practically implemented throughout the country.

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