

Seize the Chance

A development deal with the minority Muslim community leaders is very important for eradicating polio from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. As Rotary International struggles for an ambitious deal, let us not forget that it is the future of our children in India that is at stake.

Bihar's inability to curb the spread of the polio virus, especially the deadly P1 type, will cripple more children. Those affected will not be able to survive years later in a fiercely competitive world. Malnutrition is also still rising. The FAO figures show that a child dies every six seconds due to malnutrition in the world. When polio virus

strikes again, it is the most vulnerable and the poorest that suffer most. The fortunate ones, like the Rotarians, should not contribute their names to the shameful roll call when years later people analyse history to find out why this generation of people did not eradicate polio.

RI District 3250, which comprises of Bihar and Jharkhand reported 112 cases of polio on December 4, 2009. Out of this, 111 cases were from Bihar! The number of polio cases in Bihar has been coming down from 2007. From an alarming 503 cases in 2007, it dropped to 233 cases in 2008. Sixteen revenue districts in Bihar have reported polio cases. Patna, the capital city has 14 cases with 9 P1 type viruses among it. The increase in number of P1 cases in other revenue districts such as Saharsa and Samastipur are causing concern.

Experts and polio campaign managers reported the resistance the health workers faced from a section of the Muslim community

in administering the vaccine to the children. Even as the Government of India, the State Governments, Rotary International and its partner agencies push forward with the immunisation programme and healthcare reforms, ill-founded resistance from a section of

Shamshul Hoda Madarsa and a host of other learned leaders of the Muslim community.

The Muslim clerics agreed to form the Bihar Ulema Council along with Rotary on the Uttar Pradesh pattern. The Ulemas were willing to co-operate

with Rotary in carrying the message to the members.

It was agreed that Rotary would print and supply them with two lakhs handbills with message in Hindi and Urdu which could be distributed in the masjids on Fridays after the prayers. It was also agreed that Rotary would conduct frequent health camps for the benefit of the children and adults in the community. The Ulemas understood that

the only agenda for Rotary

is eradication of polio and agreed to keep away any political influence in this committee. The Ulema Council will also address other important issues such as healthcare and literacy apart from polio eradication.

Few believed earlier that an Ulema-Rotary partnership can produce a fully functional treaty. But the partnership has progressed. Eradicating polio requires a feat of bringing together people and innovation in our approach to the immunisation programme. The coming together of the Ulemas in Bihar is a chance we should seize.



Meeting with Ulemas of Bihar.

the society will increasingly dominate the success of the polio eradication programme. The increase in number of P1 cases in Bihar is an ominous threat to the PolioPlus programme.

Rotary International understood that its policy in Uttar Pradesh which resulted in the formation of the Muslim Ulema Council, can be replicated in Bihar. It was seen that the policy in Uttar Pradesh is beginning to produce results. Rotary International knows that it has to hold its nerve and soldier on while outlining its plans to the minority community which stands to gain from it. A meeting with all the top Ulemas was held at the Haj Bhawan in Patna on December 5, 2009. It was attended by Anisur Rehman Quasmi, General Secretary, Emart-e-Shariya, Bihar and Jharkhand who is also the Chairman of the Haj Committee along with Dr. Allauddin Ahmad, former Vice-chancellor of Hamdard University, Syed Shamael Ahmad, Secretary Madarsa Jamilia, Maulana Abul Kalam Quasmi, Principal,

*Trustee, The Rotary Foundation
Member, International
PolioPlus Committee
Director, Rotary International
2007-09*