Polio elimination: media can play profound role

While concrete measures are crucial for achieving a goal, public awareness not only about a disease or pandemic but also protective measures can, no doubt, enhance the chances of ending the pandemic. However, the polio virus, long known to the world, is still crippling the children and young people in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In the recent days, polio vaccination began all over the country and the new government of Afghanistan ensured the process will be as successful as it needs to be. However, the major problem in the country is not about the vaccines shortage or else, but lack of awareness and misinformation about the virus is most challenging here. Still, there are a significant number of people who, under the influence of regional scholars, think that the vaccination against polio could be harmful to their health in many different ways, some even suggesting it to be against Islam.

The officials of the previous as well as current government have often struggled to lead the general public to right direction through different channels.

According to Bakhtar News Agency (BNA) officials of northern Kunduz province of the country said that media can play a vital and crucial role in putting an end to the polio.

In a two-day workshop sponsored by UNICEF Afghanistan, Information and Culture Head of the province Mutiullah Rohani pointed out the importance of media in eradication of polio in the country.

"Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) will expose their working procedure to media and journalists," the agency quoted Rohani as saying.

Meanwhile, Kamal Shah head of UNICEF media office outlined further details about the workshop. He said that the workshop will also be carried out in other provinces including Baghlan, Takhar and Badakhshan for two days in the presence of media and journalists.

Polio vaccination had been stopped during the conflicts of the fallen government with Taliban forces. However, when IEA took control of the country, the process started once again in the country with full support and cooperation of the government. The process followed different approaches, going through home to home and vaccinating children and in some provinces the families were asked to take their children to nearby mosques.

It is worth mentioning that IEA was never against polio vaccination even before gaining power. In some parts of the country during the previous government, the polio vaccination teams had full support of the Taliban. As now they takeover the control of the country, they are trying to make sure the polio vaccines reach to each and every part of the country.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) has frequently asked people to cooperate with health workers in polio vaccination process, so that the disease gets eradicated from the country.

The Kabul Times

A hospital of women, for women: Preserving maternity care in Khost

Babies continue to be born in Afghanistan. In MSF's Khost maternity hospital, women remain at the fore, providing much-needed care to new mothers and their babies.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) first opened this specialized maternity hospital in 2012, to provide safe and free maternal and neonatal care to women and their babies in the eastern part of the country. In rural areas and away from the big cities, the majority of women do not have adequate access to essential obstetric care, and this is further exacerbated by the shortage of female midwives and doctors.

MSF said, "Due to our private funding, we are not behest to the political whims of governments. While we continue to provide care in Khost and elsewhere in Afghanistan, we witness critical funding cuts on the Afghan health system along with economic measures taken against the new government that have contributed to a financial crisis".

The suspension of funding to the health system in August meant that even when female midwives and doctors were available, they were deprived of supplies and salaries. Although some funding has been restarted, the Afghan health system is receiving less than before, so there will be no improvements to a system that for years failed to meet people's needs.

In our maternity in Khost, almost all the medical team is female. It has been described as a "hospital of women, for women". MSF is one of the largest employers of women in the province, and out of 450 staff at the moment over half are female with jobs that range from doctors and midwives to cleaners and nannies.

Having a team of women is important in this area of Afghanistan to ensure the separation of the sexes, but also so that the patients feel at ease. It's a place where families know that their mothers and daughters will be well looked after.

Khost maternity comprises an inpatient department of 60 beds; an 8-bed delivery unit; a 28-bed newborn unit that includes a 10-bed neonatal intensive care unit, two operating theatres and a dedicated kangaroo mother care area (in which mothers are encouraged to make skin-to-skin contact with their babies). MSF also provides vaccinations for newborn babies, family planning services, and undertakes health promotion activities.

Since inception, the maternity has focused on providing healthcare to pregnant 'complicated cases' – women who are experiencing some form of birth complication. However, in August, MSF decided to expand its admission criteria as there was widespread disruption and uncertainty in the country following the change in government.

Markets and transportation systems were closed, people were staying at home and many weren't sure if health facilities were still open. Although most of these issues are now resolved, a lack of funding has left pregnant women again struggling to give birth safely.

"Very quickly, we saw that the capacity of the health system was deteriorating," says Lou Cormack, MSF Khost project coordinator. "Public facilities had fewer and fewer drugs, as the supply chain was broken. Staff weren't getting paid," she says. "We even heard that a local hospital was performing operations by torchlight. The public health system, which was already struggling before the suspension of funding, was barely functioning anymore."

MSF team assisted nearly 1,650 deliveries in September, and over 2,000 deliveries in November. "We've had so many patients lately, we had 73 deliveries in one shift, and patient numbers have been increasing over the last few months," says Aqila, one of MSF's locally hired midwives. "We know this is happening because public health facilities are closed, and private doctors are very costly.

"When women can't afford to come for healthcare and give birth at home, they risk bleeding complications or severe high blood pressure disorders related to pregnancy, with no-one there to diagnose it."

Healthcare workers have done their best to keep providing care to pregnant women despite their facilities being deprived of much-needed funds.

"In the public system, we've heard of people pooling their money to buy medical items to keep their facilities open," says Cormack. "If a woman needs a caesarean-section they all chip in to buy enough fuel so the generator can run during the procedure. This is despite the fact that healthcare workers and other civil servants haven't been paid for months," she says.

"We have been providing support to the delivery units in eight local healthcare facilities in rural districts in Khost. Recently we've been doing extra maintenance to make sure they keep running, adding a bit of fuel so that they can function at night, and we've also supplied kits for normal deliveries that include a few drugs, hygiene items and a hat to keep the baby warm."

The organization that runs many of the local health centres in Khost's districts has now received funding until January. Once these centres are fully functioning and used by the community again, MSF-supported maternity will revert to its original admission criteria, focusing on pregnant women who are experiencing birth complications. However, what's going to happen after January remains unclear.

With people facing huge challenges in accessing healthcare, Aqila says she finds great comfort in helping the women in her community. "I like to help the women who deliver in Khost. The MSF maternity is a safe and great place for them, I delivered my own baby here," she says.

"I love being a part of it, to help deliver babies and to help mothers. I really have a soft spot for mothers, because they suffer so much." **Monitoring Desk**

Implementation of measures to prevent climate change, adaptation in the most vulnerable sectors of the economy

Global climate change is one of the most serious problems of today, which affects all countries of the world and turns into a significant obstacle to sustainable development. The observed warming causes extreme natural phenomena around the world, such as droughts, hurricanes, debilitating heat, fires, torrential rains and floods.

Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states are among the countries that are most susceptible to environmental disasters.

As the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted, today every country feels the destructive effects of the consequences of climate change, and these negative consequences directly pose a threat to the stable development of the Central Asian region.

According to World Bank experts, if by the end of the XXI century, while maintaining the current pace, the average temperature in the world will increase by 4 degrees Celsius, then in Central Asia this indicator will be 7 degrees. As a result of global climate change over the past 50-60 years, the area of glaciers in the region has decreased by about 30%. By 2050, water resources in the Syr Darya basin are expected to decrease by up to 5%, in the Amu Darya basin - up to 15%. By 2050, the shortage of fresh water in Central Asia could lead to an 11% drop in GDP in the region.

In order to implement measures to prevent climate change and mitigate its negative consequences, a number of regulatory legal acts have been adopted in Uzbekistan.

In particular, in 2019, the law "On the Use of renewable Energy sources" was adopted, which defines benefits and preferences, features of the use of energy sources in the production of electric and thermal energy, biogas in the use of renewable energy sources.

The Ministry of Energy of the Republic has been designated as a specially authorized state body in this area.

The decree of the Head of our state "On accelerated measures to improve the energy efficiency of economic and social sectors, the introduction of energy-saving technologies and the development of renewable energy sources" dated August 22, 2019 approved the Target parameters for the further development of renewable energy sources and the "Roadmap" for consistently improving the energy efficiency of economic and social sectors, as well as the development of energy based on renewable sources, introduced the procedure for compensating expenses.

The Resolution of the President of Uzbekistan "On approval of the Strategy for the transition of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the "green" economy for the period 2019-2030" dated October 4, 2019 approved the Strategy for the transition of the country to the "green" economy for the period 2019-2030 and the composition of the Interdepartmental Council for the Promotion and Implementation of the "green" economy.

Comprehensive measures are being implemented in the country aimed at deepening structural transformations, modernizing and diversifying the basic sectors of the economy, and balanced socio-economic development of territories.

Accelerated industrialization and population growth significantly increase the need of the economy for resources, increase the negative anthropogenic impact on the environment and the growth of greenhouse gas emissions.

In order to improve the system of public administration in the field of environmental protection, institutional reforms have been carried out. On the basis of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Management, two independent ministries were formed – agriculture and Water Management, the State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection, the Hydrometeorological Service Center were completely reformed, and the State Forestry Committee was established.

Measures are being taken in the country to improve the energy efficiency of the economy, reduce the use of hydrocarbons, and increase the share of renewable energy sources. Thus, by 2030, it is planned to double the energy efficiency index and reduce the carbon intensity of GDP, ensuring access to modern, inexpensive and reliable energy supply for 100% of the population and sectors of the economy. It is planned to save 3.3 billion kW in the economy of Uzbekistan in 2020-2022 due to energy efficiency measures.h of electricity, 2.6 billion. cubic meters of natural gas and 16.5 thousand tons of petroleum products.

In parallel, measures to combat the depletion of water resources are being strengthened. As part of the implementation of the Water Resources Management Strategy of Uzbekistan for 2021-2023, it is planned to actively introduce water-saving technologies, including drip irrigation.

Thus, it is planned to bring the introduction of water-saving irrigation technologies from 308 thousand hectares to 1.1 million hectares, including drip irrigation technologies - from 121 thousand hectares to 822 thousand hectares.

Special attention in Uzbekistan is paid to measures to minimize the consequences of the drying of the Aral Sea. Desertification and land degradation in the Aral Sea area occurs on an area of more than 2 million hectares.

By creating protective green spaces on the drained bottom of the Aral Sea (1.5 million hectares have been planted), Uzbekistan is increasing the territories occupied by forests and shrubs.

Over the past 4 years, the volume of planted forests in the republic has increased 10-15 times. If until 2018 the annual volume of forest creation was in the range of 47-52 thousand hectares, in 2019 this indicator increased to 501 thousand hectares, in 2020 - to 728 thousand hectares. Similar results were achieved, among other things, due to the expansion of the production of planting material.

The State Program for the development of the Aral Sea region for 2017-2021 has been adopted, aimed at improving the conditions and quality of life of the population of the region.

In addition, the Program of integrated socio-economic development of Karakalpakstan for 2020-2023 was approved.

In 2018, the International Innovation Center of the Aral Sea Region was established under the President of the Republic.

Against this background, Uzbekistan stands for cooperation in the field of water resources on the basis of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, mutual benefit and good faith in the spirit of good neighborliness and cooperation.

Tashkent considers it necessary to develop mechanisms for joint management of transboundary water resources in the region, ensuring a balance of interests of the Central Asian countries. At the same time, the management of the water resources of the basins of transboundary watercourses should be carried out without prejudice to the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Uzbekistan has become an active participant in global environmental policy by joining and ratifying a number of international conventions and relevant protocols in the field of environmental protection. An important event was the accession of Uzbekistan (2017) to the UN Paris Climate Agreement, under which commitments were made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere by 10% by 2030 compared to 2010. To achieve this goal, a National strategy for Low-carbon development is currently being developed, and the issue of achieving carbon neutrality of Uzbekistan by 2050 is being worked out. Uzbekistan is making active efforts to mitigate the disastrous consequences of the Aral Sea ecological disaster.

The United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Human Security for the Aral Sea Region, established in 2018 on the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, provides a single platform for cooperation at the national and international levels to address the environmental and socio-economic needs of communities living in the Aral Sea region, as well as to accelerate efforts to achieve global Sustainable Development Goals.

On October 24-25, 2019, a high-level International conference "Aral Sea Region - Zone of ecological innovations and technologies" was held in Nukus under the auspices of the United Nations.

On the proposal of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, on May 18, 2021, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a special resolution declaring the Aral Sea region a zone of environmental innovations and technologies.

The initiative of the head of Uzbekistan was positively received by the world community. The Aral Sea region became the first region to which the General Assembly granted such a significant status. At the SCO summit in Bishkek (June 14, 2019), Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed to adopt the SCO Green Belt program in order to introduce resource-saving and environmentally friendly technologies in the organization's countries. At the 14th ECO Summit (March 4, 2021), the Head of Uzbekistan took the initiative to develop and approve a medium-term strategy aimed at ensuring energy sustainability and broad attraction of investments and modern technologies in this area.

At the third Consultative Meeting of the heads of Central Asian States, held on August 6, 2021 in Turkmenistan, the President of Uzbekistan called for the development of a regional program "Green Agenda" for Central Asia, which will contribute to the adaptation of the countries of the region to climate change. The main directions of the program may be the gradual decarbonization of the economy, rational use of water resources, the introduction of energy-efficient technologies into the economy, and an increase in the share of renewable energy generation.

In general, against the background of the actualization of the international climate agenda, the long-term policy of Uzbekistan in the field of environmental protection is aimed at further improving the environmental situation in the Central Asian region.