“Polio eradication is a road and driving through this road sparks our imagination and determination to save our children”. Photo: WHO/Pakistan/ S. Kashif

Pakistan’s polio programme relies on the efforts of thousands of specialized workers. But if there’s one group almost everyone relies on, it’s the drivers.

In the endgame of eradication, reaching zero transmissions in a country like Pakistan, where wild poliovirus is still endemic, requires a vast network of expertise, from epidemiologists to negotiators to data managers and community health workers. But without drivers, much of this network wouldn’t be able to function.

Polio eradication entails wide-ranging nationwide vaccination campaigns, and in Pakistan, this means targeting more than 38 million children under the age of 5. Reaching every single child is a huge challenge and without an organized fleet of vehicles, it is almost impossible. For any type of campaign, communication and transportation are fundamental tools to deliver results. Polio programme drivers do not make deals in boardrooms, but they have a real impact on the war against polio.
Bahudar Shah (53), Islamabad, Pakistan

Bahudar Shah “It doesn’t matter whether you’re in the driver’s seat or the passenger seat, driving is an unavoidable and essential part of the polio programme, especially here in Pakistan, where the push for eradication is at such a sensitive and critical point. I have spent the last 20 years as a driver with WHO’s polio programme, always with the same focus: saving Pakistani children from this disease and securing a better future for them.”

“For polio field officers, duty starts around 8 am, but the driver’s duty starts early in the morning whether they are travelling directly to field or to the office. I personally feel that when I am in field, I am responsible for the safety of my assigned vehicle as well as that of the officer. During my 20 years with WHO, I have been a driver for both local and international staff.”

Alam Sher Khan (52), Islamabad, Pakistan
Alam Sher Khan “I joined WHO in 2002 and since then I have learned, I am working for the welfare of future generations. At work, I apply the “safety first” approach to every part of my job. I think, I am not only driving but I also act as a guide and security guard for my field officer. Because I drive with different field officers at different places, before the commencement of field work I orient my officer about the social norms, customs and security situation of the area. I also advise them to remain close to the vehicle. It is very essential to remain close to the vehicle for a possible quick escape in case of some emergency situation.

The thing I enjoy as a driver with the polio programme is the satisfaction of my passenger, the field officer. When my field officer is satisfied, I am satisfied and for this I have worked to enhance my skills. I am very good in handling vehicle maintenance properly and where necessary I can also perform minor repairs.”

Ghulam Asghar (59), Islamabad, Pakistan

Ghulam Asghar “For the last 16 years, I have played a significant role in polio eradication in Pakistan. My level of responsibility as a driver is very high. Polio eradication is a programme that requires strong teamwork. While performing my duty with different field officers, I assist them in finding local vaccination teams and convincing the community of the importance of vaccination, and I clear any hurdles so they can do their jobs during case investigation, campaign monitoring and LQAS.

When my officer covers refusals during campaign monitoring, it gives me the most satisfaction as I feel that we have saved a child from permanent disability. When there is some refusal I actively assist my officer to counter that refusal. I also advocate with local my community and try to satisfy them about the efficacy of the vaccine.”
Jamil Abbasi (46), Islamabad, Pakistan

“I have been a driver for the polio programme for the last 14 years. I think whether you are a polio eradication officer, data personnel, technical staff, a consultant, a member of the communication team or a driver, every single employee is playing a very significant role in polio eradication efforts.

I have a strong wish to see Pakistan polio free. Although I am not directly involved in eradication activities, indirectly I am contributing to better implementation and success of routine immunization efforts by safely transporting field officers to their assigned duty areas. I am proud that I am a part of hardworking team who are trying to defeat the polio virus.”

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